

SURREY MIRROR

1992 *Orpheus in the Underworld*

Harlequin's Greek Treat

Ancient Greece was the setting for what proved to be a most innovative and fresh production of *Orpheus in the Underworld*, where the Gods run amok! With libretto by Phil Park and music by Jacques Offenbach, Musical Director, Angela Barker set the mood with an overture that ran at a cracking pace. It was exciting with great depth of feeling - Oh what a wonderful sound!

The curtains opened onto Act I which gave the effect of a fairy grotto with stylistic furniture. Torches used with great effect by the chorus gave us the feeling of being in at the sunrise of the most perfect day. The chorus singing was good, particularly well balanced in the opening chorus, the words of which had been very cleverly and subtly changed to suit the mood of this modern day. The costumes were a clever mixture of periods, Victorian, Greek and Arcadian, with the younger member of the chorus in a very colourful tights.

Calliope, played by a Susan Rowlinson, tried to herd her unruly sheep into some semblance of order. This she did to good effect, though it was a pity some of her best lines were lost in the body of the theatre. Her son, Orpheus, played with extreme verve and panache by Simon Cooksey made the most of a very difficult role, which can often be played in a weak manner but not so in this case.

Euydice, the wife of Orpheus, was exquisitely portrayed by Carol Hunt; she acted delightfully and her singing throughout was faultless, particularly in the cadenzas of the Fly Duet in Act III with Jupiter. As if this was not enough for a single performer, we were then treated to the most superb dancing in the cancan by this very talented young woman. It was disappointing we did not hear her sing the Hymn to Bacchus which was omitted from the production.

David Longes, as Pluto the King of Hades, at first appeared uneasy in his role, but grew in vocal stability throughout his performance and his acting left the audience in no doubt as to his ability.

In Act II we were treated to an amazing set with clouds, pillars, UV lighting, a very large bed; and the chorus arranged sleeping in groups which gave the illusion of clouds some complete with bubbly wigs. Here the music hastens in to the unsettled world of Jupiter, King of the gods played by Andrew Glass in the most assured and polished performance, flashing thunderbolts at his revolting children. Patricia Felstead gave an outstanding performance as Juno, wife of Jupiter. Her timing was spot-on and her sense of fun exuded to every corner of the theatre – what a lovely dipsomaniac!

Venus (Michelle Luck), Diana (Margaret Longes) and Cupid (Jill Perry), led the revolt against Jupiter and their quartet with Mars (John Rapley) together with the chorus was one of the highlights of the ensemble work. Philip Felstead as Mercury, Messenger of the Gods, controlled his winged skates with all the skill of a *Starlight Express* star and his acting was vaguely reminiscent of Clive Dunn in *Dad's Army*.

The Director, Gillian Jarvis, is to be congratulated on keeping a tight rein on her ship. Ingenious use of lighting effects and general movement of the chorus created some excellent three-dimensional pictures.

Anne Manning