



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Woodley Light Operatic Society  
Production : South Pacific  
Date : Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June  
Venue : Kenton Theatre - Henley  
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

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## Show Report

I was delighted to be invited to review Woodley's latest offering South Pacific. I have heard it said in certain circles that this is an outdated show; I however do not think it is, and this society categorically confirmed this.

I was fortunate to speak with Jane prior to curtain up and she confided this was her first attempt at directing with words and had at times felt completely out of her comfort zone. She also said she had been inspired where the staging was concerned, but I could see what I thought. So with some trepidation I took my seat.

**Melissa Heaps** - (Nellie Forbush) – This was a standout performance by this young lady; she had every aspect of the character off to perfection. There was a great sense of fun, and her emotion and compassion were natural and believable. The rapport which developed between her and Emile was impassioned and touching. She moved effortlessly around the stage and her dancing was joyful and spontaneous. She was vivacious animated and expressive in her dialogue and singing. All her numbers were well sung and delivered in character, but I especially enjoyed “This is how it Feels” with Emile.

**Ray Higgs** – (Emile De Becque) – I was totally smitten with this characterisation; and the accent (which was perfect and never wavered) made you feel all tingly and fuzzy. His dialogue was well projected with plenty of light and shade with all the right inflections. His singing was deliciously mellow and euphonic; and he put his numbers over in character, without losing his accent displaying exceptional depth and insight into the lyrics. “This nearly was mine” was the highlight of the evening.

**Millie Fancourt/Olivia Fancourt** – (Ngana/Akika) – These two youngsters were delightful; they looked the part and were animated and spirited. Their dialogue was well projected (a major accomplishment not having any microphones) and their singing was bright and tuneful. Well done girls!

**Margaret Watson** – (Helene) – Although this was a minor role she portrayed the character with charm and empathy supporting Emile and chaperoning the children.

**Jenny Stacey** – (Bloody Mary) – This was an interesting character; I personally thought she was little too nice. I would like to have seen more grit and gravel. That said accent was perfect, dialogue was well delivered and she had the most delightfully contagious laugh. Her rapport with Liat was first rate as it was with the boys. “Bali-Ha” was sung with a melodic resonance and “Happy Talk” was lively entertaining and fun.

**Catherine Johnson** – (Liat) – This is such a lovely little character role and one which this young lady portrayed with affection and tenderness. Her dancing was in keeping with the character delicate and fluid; she produced some lovely soft arm lines with expressive hand movements and facial expressions complimenting her characterisation.

**Alistair Parry** – (Luther Billis) – I really enjoyed this animated lively and spontaneous characterisation. His dialogue was well delivered and projected matching his personality being impulsive and winning. He was a natural mover and (I would have liked to have seen him do more) his Honey Bun with Nellie was well sung and decidedly cheeky; a definite hit with the audience.

**Eli Johnson** – (Lt Joseph Cable) – This young man was a pleasure to watch; his emotional characterisation was superlative and his dialogue, movement and visuals were all first rate. His rapport with Liat was warm, giving and obsessive. His singing was truly accomplished and both his numbers were a delight, with “Carefully Taught” being heart felt.

**John Robertson** – (Capt. George Brackett) – I have seen productions where this character has been rather insipid and unmemorable. Not on this occasion; he made the absolute most of being the stereotypical Naval Captain. His dialogue was distinctive with a good accent and vibrant projection. He moved with a blustering gait which befitted the character perfectly; an all-round well developed character

**David Wilson** - (Cmdr. William Harbison) – Here was the perfect foil for Brackett and he portrayed the character as only a true sidekick can. Dialogue was pacey yet hesitant in total keeping with his personality. He and Brackett worked so well together bouncing dialogue off each other the perfect double act.

**Tony Towers** – (Stewpot)

**John Bagshaw** – (Professor)

**Ben Leach** – (McCaffrey)

**Chris Wakelin** – (Quale)

**Michelle Nelson** – (Dinah Murphy)

**Gemma Bagshaw** – (Janet MacGreggor) – These six minor characters all portrayed their characters with great aplomb supporting the principals with a great sense of fun taunting and teasing. Their singing movement and dialogue were all first rate.

**Marines/Sailors/Seebees/Nurses** – This chorus was second to none; each portraying a character which always had a purpose for being in the scene. They moved easily around the acting area and sang with expressive strength and fortitude. The men’s “Nothing Like a Dame” was famously sung with good movement and the girl’s “Wash that Man” was a real treat and delectably gratifying.

**Jane Murphy** - (Director) – Well I need not have had any concerns regarding this young ladies capabilities in directing. This was an absolutely first rate production having been exceptionally well cast and superbly directed. Not only had she ensured all the principals had believable, three dimensional characterisations; but the chorus members also had individual characters that they carried through in every scene. Her staging was exemplary with no

upstaging and creating maximum acting areas. She had worked hard on diction and projection and it is a credit to her that (although there was not a personal mic to be seen) we heard every word of dialogue and every lyric to each song. The way she had designed the three main scenes meant the piece flowed effortlessly from scene to scene and kept the pace moving. I do have a couple of minor niggles; I was uncertain as to why there were ladies in western dress on Bali-Ha'i and I would like to have seen Liat take Cable behind the curtain leaving the audience to imagine what was about to happen. However this was an exceptional directorial debut and one that she should be exceedingly proud.

**Naomi De Cillo** – (Musical Director) – It was more than obvious the hard work this young lady had put in to both principal and chorus music. She had gathered together a noteworthy group of musicians which she controlled with precision ensuring the balance between pit and stage was perfect.

**David Parsoson** – (Choreographer) – The experience of this choreographer really showed in all the routines throughout this performance. He had pitched the movement exactly right ensuring they were all able to perform everything they had been given. They had been drilled to perfection in particular the girls in the Honey Bun routine. Great routines well executed.

**David Anthony** – (Stage Manager) – The stage was extremely well run with changes being effected quickly quietly and efficiently.

**Dinrino Theatre Services** – (Lighting &Sound) – All aspects of lighting and sound were perfect for the piece creating atmospheric moods. It was well controlled and all cues were picked up with no falters or flaws.

**Jane Murphy/Jane Wilson** - (Wardrobe Mistresses) – All costumes from uniforms to grass skirts were perfect for the period and nationalities. They added to the overall appearance and gave authenticity to the piece.

**Jo Hunt** – (Props) – Props had been well collated and were all appropriate for their usage and there was nothing to cause the actors any concern.

**Jane Murphy/Jasper McGuire** – (Programme) – This was simple but effective containing all the necessary information. The front cover was lovely which immediately transported you to the idyllic South Pacific.

**Tom Dance** – (Front of House) – These members of the society were easily identifiable and all extremely friendly. I thank them for looking after me so well

Thank you

**Jet**

Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13