



### HMS Pinafore

For their summer concert in the Minster, Axminster & District Choral Society abandoned their formal dress code of black and white and took their places wearing casual outfits with distinct naval and Edwardian touches. After the opening short pieces by Handel, Mozart and Holst, interesting, unfamiliar and widely varied in styles, the two pianos launched into the introductory music for Gilbert & Sullivan's HMS Pinafore and the large audience sat back and smiled. Although this was a concert performance of extracts, it became evident from the opening chorus that the singers were indeed telling the story and acting the parts. The plot is simple and traditional: posh girl falls in love with humble sailor; proud papa refuses consent; nursemaid finally reveals that a baby mix-up at birth reversed their relative positions in society; now all couples could marry amid much rejoicing.

Where a little more information was required, narrations were woven into the musical items, read by members of the choir, which worked very well.

The singing crew of sailors was jolly, attentive and audible, not only in their own specific choruses but also as backing-group for many of the solos. They juggled their scores, hats and patriotic flags with seamanlike agility, entering into the spirit of the production with enthusiasm. All soloists bar one (Edward Woodhouse) were members of the society, and all deserve loud applause for the quality of their singing, acting and diction. Edward, as befits a professional, took the role of the young suitor, declaring his love with lyrical distinction for the Captain's daughter, played winsomely and sung beautifully by Marjie Dorling.

To take the Captain's part, former musical director Francis Burroughes came out of retirement, gold-braided his dinner suit and revelled in the haughtiness called for.

Higher up the ranks, the Ruler of the Navy, sporting more gold braid and feathers in his hat, was sung by Cam Bowie whose every word was heard clearly – most important with such clever patter-songs.

His entourage of sisters and cousins was represented by Hebe (Katharine Murray), in floral dress and pretty bonnet. From the lower decks Dick Deadeye (Madi Breach), with parrot on shoulder, sneaked on the lovers, the Bosun (Alan Bulmer) and Carpenter (Mike King) added their contribution, and finally there was the nursemaid, Buttercup, splendidly played by Heather Lee, who brought the story to its conclusion and, in addition, married the demoted Captain. If one or two of them forgot the occasional line, it mattered not a bit – most of the audience knew it anyway. Throughout, also sporting maritime accessories, the two outstanding accompanists, Peter Lea-Cox and Peter Parshall, responded, supported, but most of all entertained with their superb skills at the piano. And who was responsible for this great evening out? Why, Judy Martin of course, the diminutive, larger than life, inspirational musical director who coaxed, controlled and applauded her singers and players. What fun it was – indeed, what joy and rapture.

Written by Sydie Bones.