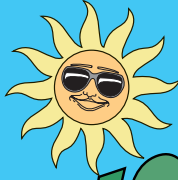


WGS  
ON



SUMMER 2003

# NEWS & VIEWS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE WEST WICKHAM OPERATIC SOCIETY No 35

## Key Notes

Mack Sennett has finished his last 2-reeler and Mabel Normand is now laid to rest amongst her "roses" but I expect those Keystone Kops are still chasing convicts, or being chased by custard pies, somewhere out there in the wide blue (or black & white) yonder. We all had a very happy and enjoyable week rushing about between New York and Hollywood fired up by the enthusiasm of the production team who made rehearsals and performances such fun.

Special thanks must go to our director, Kevin Gauntlett, for his vision and ideas; to our music director, Guy Norris, for a great musical sound; to our lighting designer, Ivan Buckle, for such a splendid lighting plot; to our new choreographer, Zoë Ellen, for some stunning routines; and to our stage managers, Maggie and Alan Matthews, for their calm and efficient handling of what was a technical nightmare.

With some invoices still to come our treasurer predicts a loss of £6,000 which is containable thanks to our healthy reserves helped in no small measure by the success of our Olde Tyme Music Halls.

The next show will be Rodgers and Hammerstein's popular *The King and I*, which has just been released to amateurs following a highly successful professional revival. We are hoping that this will redress some of the loss on *Mack & Mabel* but, like all shows, it will depend on the efforts of every member to sell tickets.

Don't forget that there are several Olde Tyme Music Halls coming up soon (see the back page) so if you haven't seen one before then book now, and if you have seen one then come again - they're great fun.

After a gap of 18 years we are returning to 'classical' G&S with *The Yeomen of the Guard* next Spring. Professional G&S has been to the Churchill Theatre recently so we hope that Bromley is now ready for further revivals.

Graham Copeland

*Mack & Mabel* never seems to have captured the imaginations of theatregoers and, while Broadway and West End critics were not too hard on the musical at its opening nights, audiences have not exactly flocked to see it.

I have to admit to being one of those who puts *Mack & Mabel* in the category 'once seen and soon forgotten'.

Last week, however, the West Wickham Operatic Society brought their production of the show to the Churchill Theatre and showed me just how wrong I have been.

The musical sparkled with energy, great singing and characterisations, superb dancing and choreography.

But above all, it was full of invention and the era of the silent screen was brought to life in a way that was fun and entertaining. As the audience arrived, the stage curtains had been drawn and a large screen was showing non-stop extracts from the comic and dramatic silent movies of the early 1900s. This set the scene for the story to perfection.

With the emergence of director, producer, and impresario Mack Sennett, the silent film surged in popularity and Sennett not only made an unknown would-be actress called Mabel Normand into the greatest female comedienne and movie star of the era, he came very close to marrying his protege. I suspect it will be a long time before

I see anyone play the part of Sennett with such style, confidence, and vocal skill as Ron Leagas.

'Magnificent' is a good description.

Sally-Anne Luckhurst has blossomed into a , confident actress with an excellent singing voice. She made the, role of Normand one to remember.

Jacqui Morris played a film actress with her eyes set on a stage career. When her big chance came, the stage was transformed into a Ziegfeld Follies type setting which brought the very talented Ms Morris an ovation.

Kevin Gauntlett and David Hogson brought real comedy to their roles as two theatre investors while Chris Arden excelled as a dubious director who marries Mabel Normand. Robert Heather, too, made a big impact as the controversial film star Fatty Arbuckle.

In a near faultless production, Zoë Ellen made an impressive debut as choreographer for the society, Kevin Gauntlett's direction was a model of how to bring enjoyment from the most unlikely situations, Ivan Buckle's lighting was as inventive as the direction, while the very professional orchestra was led by Guy Norris.

*Roy Atterbury*

Kentish Times, 22nd May 2003



# MABEL NEWS

The era of silent movies was comparatively brief, but it produced its giants and left behind a huge legacy of nostalgia. One of

those giants was Mack Sennett, memorial-ised in this Broadway musical by Michael Stewart (book), and Jerry Herman (music and lyrics), and largely responsible for the slapstick which, was its comic trademark.

Looking back from the early days of talkies, the opening scene finds him lamenting that lost world and darkly predicting that one day the movies may even be in colour and use bad language!

West Wickham Operatic Society's production is directed by Kevin Gauntlett, who himself appears with David Hodgson as one of a pair of backers in the pioneering days. No grey-suited tycoons they, more like the brokers' men in panto, or Laurel and Hardy in embryo..

Indeed, the whole thing has about it an air of cheerful improvisation, of building an industry from one moment to the next. This is not to say the dance routines by choreographer Zoë Ellen are not beautifully rehearsed, nor the songs put over with real feeling. They are.

But Ron Leagas, at the heart of it as

Mack himself, comes over as a chancer, something of an artistic vagabond driven only by the obsession to make the world laugh at all costs.

Always running away, whether from creditors or destiny, he is partnered by Sally-Anne Luckhurst as Mabel Normand, herself a star of silent comedy who, like a moth too near the flame, burns herself out and dies in her thirties on the very point of starting up with Mack all over again.

She gives a searching, deeply felt, performance; fragile and vulnerable, easily led by Chris Arden as the dastardly film director William Desmond Taylor, yet somehow true to Mack in her perverse fashion.

Jacqui Morris is the fading hooper Lottie Ames, and stars in the fine production number *Tap Your Troubles Away*. In the ample person of Robert Heather, we meet the irrepressible Fatty Arbuckle, who was, like Mabel herself, to be tainted by scandal.

The music bounces along merrily under Guy Morris, and the big studio number *When Mabel Comes in the Room* recalls the extravagant welcome given the matchmaker Dolly in another celebratory musical. Hello, Mabel, and welcome.

*Donald Madgwick*

Croydon Advertiser, 26th May 2003

# FAMILY NEWS

**CONGRATULATIONS TO  
Jo & Georg Tormann  
on the recent arrival of  
their daughter**



**LEAH**

**BEST WISHES TO**



**Louise & Kevin  
Gauntlett -  
arrivals are expected  
in August**

**Victoria & George  
McCracken -  
arrival is expected  
in November**

## REMINDER

**If you still haven't paid your Annual Subscriptions then David will be very pleased to receive your cheque, payable to WWOS.**

**Acting: £20**

**Non-Acting: £5**

**Patron: £3**

**To: David Hodgson, 25 Repton Road, Orpington, Kent. BR6 9HR**

## 2003 DIARY DATES

<b>Thursday 12 June</b>	<b>OLDE TYME MUSIC HALL</b>	<b>The Churchill Theatre</b>
<b>Friday 13 June</b>	<b>OLDE TYME MUSIC HALL</b>	<b>The Barn, Oxted</b>
<b>Saturday 14 June</b>	<b>OLDE TYME MUSIC HALL</b>	<b>The Barn, Oxted</b>
<b>Friday 4 July</b>	<b>OLDE TYME MUSIC HALL</b>	<b>Wickham Theatre Centre</b>
<b>Saturday 5 July</b>	<b>OLDE TYME MUSIC HALL</b>	<b>Wickham Theatre Centre</b>
<b>Friday 3 October</b>	<b>OLDE TYME MUSIC HALL</b>	<b>Selsdon Hall</b>
<b>11-15 November</b>	<b>The King and I</b>	<b>The Churchill Theatre</b>
<b>Spring 2004</b>	<b>The Women of the Guard</b>	<b>The Churchill Theatre</b>

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