


# Amateur Showcase



There's nothing like an old favourite on a winter's evening. We enjoy snuggling up to watch a bit of *Downton* or *Miss Marple* as the storms rage outside; bad things may happen along the way, but everything, we know, will work out in the end. On Monday night at The **King's Theatre** two of Edinburgh's finest amateur companies gave us a taste of 'theatrical cosy', whilst a third showed us a snippet of something a little more modern; what all three had in common were glorious exuberance and joie de vivre.

**The Southern Light Opera Company, Edinburgh Gilbert & Sullivan Society** and **The Bohemians Lyric Opera Company** are all old hands at what they do – producing sparkling musicals and operettas that go down a storm every time – and judging by  Monday's excerpts, their new shows will be no exception.

And as compère **Alan Borthwick**, who's directed all of these groups over the years, observes, 'You can see all three of these great productions for the price of one ticket to some of the travelling musicals that come to Edinburgh'.

After an entertaining Piping In of the Haggis (it was Burns' Night after all...) by accomplished 13 year old piper Andrew, and a dramatic (to say the least) addressing of that savoury beast by Alan ('You'll have brought your drinks? Oh well, just pretend...), the evening began.



Image: Greg Macvean



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**The Southern Light Opera Company** has decided to take us away from a cold and wintry Edinburgh, over the rainbow to **Oz**. While most of us will be familiar with the 1939 film version of **L Frank Baum's** book, ***The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*** was first  adapted as a musical for the stage in Chicago in 1902.

Since then the story of the girl who, with her friends the Scarecrow, the Lion and the Tin Man, takes the Yellow Brick Road to the Emerald City, has had numerous incarnations (there's even been one called *The Wonderful Wizard of AIDS*, a health education resource) and remains a rich source of great characters and wonderful songs. SLO's **Anna Chidgey** plays Dorothy, **Laurence Aitken** the Tin Man, **Gary Gray** the Lion and **Rory McLean** the Scarecrow, while an enthusiastic band of child actors fills the roles of the Munchkins, the latter giving us a charming rendition of the *Lullaby League/Lollipop Guild* song. Gray brings some charming touches to the Lion, nervously twiddling his tail as he longs for some courage, and McLean's Scarecrow in particular is already tremendously polished, with outstanding singing and dancing. So if you want to see the Wizard, get your tickets now – they're already in short supply for some performances. Show dates are 23rd-27th February, with a matinée on Saturday 27th.



Image: Greg Macvean



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Something about strong women seems to appeal to **The Bohemians**; last year they gave us ***Sister Act*** and now they're turning their hands to the hugely successful (Alan Borthwick: 'The Broadway production grossed more than a million dollars a week at the Box Office – they're looking forward to that') ***Legally Blonde***, the story of a girl who goes to law school to try to win back her boyfriend – and ends up winning a whole lot more. Monday night's performance included the fantastic, high energy numbers *Omigod You Guys*, *Positive* and *So Much Better*, each one perfectly synchronised and performed with infectious enthusiasm. What's more, we're also promised two canine stars, for which roles auditions were held on Saturday. Oz may have its Munchkins, but who can resist a four-legged thespian? *Legally Blonde* will be at the King's Theatre 16th-19th March, with a matinée on Saturday 19th.



Image: Simon Boothroyd



Image: Greg Macvean



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And so we come to **Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers***. I have to admit to a penchant for operetta, so I was already looking forward to this one – and as ever, **EDGAS** did not disappoint. Although they haven't quite finished preparing their dance numbers yet, the cast gave a fabulously promising taster of this much-loved satire in which the quest for the identity of the true heir to the Kingdom of Baratavia leads to all sorts of shenanigans among the canals and palaces of Venice. EDGAS's standards are always high and *The Gondoliers* is already looking good.



The outstanding **Fiona Main**, who gave us such a wonderful Nellie Forbush in EDGAS's *South Pacific* last year, is set to shine again as the **Duchess of Plaza-Toro**, with facial expressions that are a sight to behold, and **Chris Cotter** is

hugely entertaining as the Duke's attendant **Luiz** – his drumming scene is pure slapstick, and again, his animated expressions are a joy. The cast's diction is excellent – the audience can hear every word, something which is perhaps especially important in Gilbert and Sullivan. *The Gondoliers* was an instant hit when it opened in 1889; EDGAS's version is clearly set to do just as well when it takes the stage this spring. Show dates are 8-12th March, with a matinée on Saturday 12th.

Tickets for all performances are available from the King's Theatre and Festival Theatre Box Offices or direct from the companies themselves. So forget the sleet and howling winds and book yourself a bit of sunshine – be transported to California and Venice, go over that rainbow to the Merry Old Land of Oz, and have a great night out at these splendid shows.

All images by **Greg Macvean** except those of Duke of Plaza-Toro and Duke, Duchess and Luiz, both by **Simon Boothroyd**.

