

# Pirates of Penzance a pleasant surprise

by Anne Rajotte  
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Dancing pirates, "a bevy of beautiful maidens," and a Major-General make up the cast that are performing The Pirates of Penzance tonight through this weekend.

The operetta starts around the turn of the century with Frederic (Mike Lechner) being freed from his indentures as an apprentice with a band of soft-hearted pirates. It is explained by his nursery maid Ruth (Jonelle Wilson) that he was supposed to be apprenticed to a pilot, but she misheard and indentured instead him to pirates. Frederic feels that he has a duty to exterminate the pirates as soon as he is freed from them. From there, Frederic meets a group of sisters and falls in love with one, Mabel (Gretchen Foust). The pirates descend on the group and demand to marry the sisters. Their father, Major-General Stanley (Geoffrey Pieper) rescues them by claiming he is an orphan, though he is not. The pirates have a rule that they never attack orphans, for they are all orphans themselves.

While Major-General Stanley is plagued by guilt from his lie, Frederic organizes a police force to attack the pirates. Meanwhile, the Pirate King (RJ Frelin) and Ruth have discovered that Frederic was born on February 29 of a leap year and while he has lived twenty-one years, he has only had five birthdays. He was indentured until his twenty-first birthday, not until his twenty-first year. Because of his sense of duty, Frederic is compelled to rejoin the pirates, revealing Major-General Stanley's lie and leaving Mabel with the promise that he would be back in 1940 to claim her. He then leaves to fight against the police force that he assembled. The confusion results in the final scene, where the pi-

lice comically fight the pirates.

The Pirates of Penzance was certainly an ambitious project for the director, Tony Elliot, to undertake. He was able to find some tremendous talent at Behrend and from the Erie community. Foust had some difficult vocal parts, which she handled well. Pieper did very well with the famously fast song, "I Am the Very Model of a Model Major General." Frelin as the Pirate King was probably the most memorable character. He added a lot of humor and personality to his part without overacting.

The set was simple but effective and the costumes were lively. The instrumental music consisted only of keyboards and percussion, but managed to stay strong throughout the show. It was actually quite impressive how just a few instrumentalists could almost do the job of a pit orchestra.

Although the show was performed in the Reed Commons, the venue seemed to hinder the production only a little. There were some minor sound problems, but altogether, the size and the acoustics of the room didn't prove to be detrimental.

On the whole, The Pirates of Penzance was a surprisingly well performed show. This is the first musical performed at Behrend since 1987, and it was quite a successful attempt. The cast added a lot of personality to their characters and seemed to update the roles a bit from their original setting of the nineteenth century.

The Pirates of Penzance was a wonderful risk to take for the theater program. Obviously, there is the talent and the resources in our community to produce such a show. It is hoped that this will start a tradition of musicals performed at Behrend.



Ruth (Jonelle Wilson) dances with the band of pirates in the first act.



Ruth (Jonelle Wilson) lifts her bottle as one pirate (John Champagne) kneels to her immediate left, and another pirate (Tom Burger) kneels to her right.



Frederic (Mike Lechner), left, and The Pirate King (RJ Frelin), right, listen to Ruth (Jonelle Wilson).

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