

# FRINGE&PURGE

## Hip Shot: *Trial By Jury*

Posted by **Catherine Aselford** on Jul. 13, 2012 at 8:41 am

**Victorian Lyric Opera presents *Trial by Jury***

**Mountain at Mount Vernon Methodist Church**

### Remaining Performances:

Friday, July 13, 10:15 p.m.

Saturday, July 14, 5:45 p.m.

Tuesday, July 17, 8 p.m.

Saturday, July 21, 12:15 p.m.

Friday, July 27, 11:59 PM



**They Say:** "Law & Disorder! A showboating judge, a rich playboy, a famous actress and her Harvard lawyer face off in Britain's first televised courtroom case! Pop culture collides with Victorian jurisprudence in this modern take on a Gilbert & Sullivan classic."

**Catherine's Take:** Pop culture is weirder than this—just watch *Judge Judy*. The modern-day concept might actually make *Trial by Jury* more realistic than productions set in 1875, the year the comic opera premiered. W.S. Gilbert was a barrister before becoming a fulltime writer, and his breach of promise trial set to music is surreal: Usually, the stuffy judge enters with a jig-step; the plaintiff arrives in full bridal regalia, preceded by her bridesmaids; the defendant produces a stringed instrument out of nowhere to accompany himself while singing his testimony. This show misses those Warner Brothers moments.

Arthur Sullivan's tunes and Gilbert's libretto are wittier and more pointed than the staging or the comic performances. In directors Ali and Pete Oliver-Krueger's production, the judge is silly because he's preening for the cameras, not because he's self-important. Reimagining the jilted bride as a siren posing for the press does away with the humor of casting the sweet ingenue as a gold-digger (and if she's a movie star, as the program states, why does she need to marry a judge for money?). There could have been lots more comedy in turning the usually baritone and fatherly Counsel for the Plaintiff into a woman's role,

but Denise Young’s lovely soprano more than compensates.

While there are missed opportunities for comic bits, there are some new, clever gags. Turns out that the “other woman” for whom the defendant dumped the plaintiff is...no, I won’t tell and spoil the joke. The jury, falling unanimously in love with the plaintiff, is still a hoot.

There are musical gems in this *Trial*. The sweet-natured, slow usher (that’s bailiff to Americans) has a mellow voice, especially nice at the bottom of his range. **Watching David Merrill’s smarmy defendant is almost as much fun as listening to his strong and flexible tenor.** Courtney Kalbacker’s Plaintiff wowed the audience with her gorgeous voice and her gorgeous gams.

All in all, this update of Gilbert and Sullivan’s musical trial is consistently pleasurable, but seldom truly funny.

**See It If:** Great tunes, funny lines, and a few great voices make you happy.

**Skip It If:** Generic “acting silly” sets you on edge.

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