

THEATER

'Gondoliers': Blissful Silliness



BY JOEL HOFFMAN

Bruce McClelland, left, Gordon Bringham and Todd Long in "The Gondoliers."

By Leonard Hughes
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Gilbert and Sullivan fans will find three hours of bliss in the Victorian Lyric Opera Company's production of "The Gondoliers."

But if the G&S turn-of-the-century brand of musical silliness is not your cup of tea, you still might enjoy the well-made pageantry of it all, continuing this weekend at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre in Rockville.

A classy 30-piece orchestra and a fun-loving cast of almost 50 singers and dancers are obviously having a good time with this thing, and sometimes the audience catches the mood.

Director Barry Morley allows the cast to clown around and exaggerate the spoken lines, although the musical ones are performed more naturally and are more believable.

If you don't know the plot, plan to arrive early enough to read the program, which includes a succinct script summary, a complete list of songs and even a short glossary of archaic terms. Copies of lyrics are available on loan so you won't miss those clever British puns and couplets.

Alternately titled "The King of Barataria," the story is about two common Venetian gondoliers who are whisked away to reign over an island kingdom until it can be determined which of the two brothers is the proper heir to the throne.

The true king was married in infancy to a duke's daughter, also an infant at the time, and was hidden from

bloodthirsty members of an insurrection. Twenty years later, the king's identity is about to be revealed by an elderly woman who cared for him, but meanwhile the gondolier-brothers share the throne and rule by the principle of "universal equality."

The first half of the show drags somewhat while all of this is being established, but the second act gets moving fast.

A high point of the Victorian Lyric Opera's production is the performance of Gordon Bringham, who plays the authoritarian Grand Inquisitor, a sort of Newt Gingrich spoilsport who challenges the brothers' government for and by the common man.

Bruce McClelland as Marco, one of the gondoliers, performs a beautiful solo in "Take a pair of sparkling eyes." And John Perine, as the Duke, executes a comic tour de force, with Shirley Friedman as his sharp-tongued wife.

Costume designer Edith Livingstone brightens the stage with her colorful peasant clothing and formal at-court coats and gowns.

Marjorie Perine's choreography is dynamic. And music director Michael Plant conducts the orchestra with verve and never allows the instruments to obscure the rousing songs and witty lyrics of "The Gondoliers."

"The Gondoliers" continues at 8 p.m. tomorrow and Saturday and at 2 p.m. Sunday at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre, Rockville Civic Center Park, 603 Edmonston Dr., Rockville. Call 301-879-0220 for reservations.