

REVIEW

Savoyards' 'Patience'

colorful, enjoyable

By JOHN AEHL
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The Madison Savoyards production of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Patience," which opened Friday night in Music Hall on the UW campus, got just about everything right.

This was a delicious, delightful, delectable evening that had the details honed finely, right to the last little girl, age 8 or 9, in the exuberant 39-member cast.

Excellent singing. Imaginative staging and actor movement in a relatively limited space, right down to the roll-in cows. Colorful costumes — and a lot of them — with an interesting bucolic background of a barn, complete with hayloft and a lot of hay.

And very good acting and mostly good enunciation, critical in getting across the barrage of cultural and social references and famous, not-so-famous, and once-famous but now arcane names (Lord Horatio Nelson is easy, but how about Roderick Dhu, a Highland chieftain a character in Scott's "Lady of the Lake"), and the witty lines and puns.

Recent Savoyards productions have tended to be a bit static, a bit too refined. This was not.

In an audience some 125 years removed from the 1881 British opening, the topical nature of the story makes "Patience" sometimes inaccessible, but everybody gets the basic premise: An affectionate but thorough satirization of the "esthetic craze" in England, centered on a simple love triangle that is complicated by a lot of other love interests. The theoretical

principal protagonist is one Reginald Bunthorne, "a fleshly poet" (James Rowe, garbed all in pale yellow), pitted against one Archibald Grosvenor (a lanky Christian Smith-Kotlarek, in pale green velvet), an impossibly beautiful (according to everybody, including himself) composer of doggerel, but there are many principals, 11 worthy of note. As Patience, the dairy-maid central love interest, Catherine Schweitzer had the most impressive voice, a model G&S lyric soprano, and at least a couple of the best comic set-pieces with Smith-Kotlarek, a laid-back humorist with excellent timing.

My favorite, though, has to be the Lady Jane, a buxom Kathleen Butitta, in satin purple gown, who by the mere sneering lift of an eyebrow or a twirl of an ample frame or a carting-off-stage of an oversize bass fiddle captivated a mildly disappointing turnout of about three-quarters of the hall. Butitta was downright hilarious in her own overblown way.

But she was only one in a cast filled with comic actors and fine singers — a vivacious and patrician-looking Sarah Z. Johnson as a primary love-sick maiden, Lady Angela; a rough-voiced and broad-stroked physical comic, Robert Kovak, as Colonel Calverley, who came close to pulling off the most difficult patter song in the operetta; and Christopher Smith as the Duke. There were quite a few others.

Be sure to see one of the five performances remaining, which are: at 7:30 tonight, 3 p.m. Sunday, 7:30 p.m. July 28 and 29, and 3 p.m. July 30.