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Review/Operetta

Gilbert-Sullivan Players In 'The Gondoliers'

By JAMES R. OESTREICH

"I must thank you for the magnificent work you have put into the piece," wrote William S. Gilbert to Arthur Sullivan with a somewhat strained modesty on Dec. 8, 1889, the day after the first performance of "The Gondoliers," which the two had interrupted their bickering long enough to write. "It gives one the chance of shining right through the

20th century with a reflected light."

The 100th-anniversary production of "Gondoliers" that the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players mounted last Thursday at Symphony Space gives renewed hope that the librettist and composer will indeed shine through this century and well into the next. Having endured too many routine and hoked-up performances, one begins to doubt that works like this have anything to say to us anymore. But at Friday evening's performance, the Players, relying on honest interpretation and solid craft, filled the dingy stage with an infectious joy.

"The Gondoliers, or The King of Barataria" was the 12th of the 14 musical comedies created by Gilbert and Sullivan. By the time of its creation, the composer's chief ambitions lay in the direction of serious opera, a tendency reflected in the quantity and sophistication of the music he poured into this work. It makes some strenuous demands on the singers, who in this performance almost always proved adequate to the task and occasionally showed real distinction. Todd Murray, strong as one of the Gondoliers, was partnered by an understudy, Shawn Churchman, less imposing. Cynthia Reynolds, Katie Geissinger and Joy Hermalyn sang charmingly in the female leads, and Del-Bouree Bach was deft as the



Ph. Images/Lee Snider

Todd Murray, left, Keith Jurosko and Katie Geissinger in "The Gondoliers."

comic Grand Inquisitor.

But the greatest musical treats were provided in the troupe's ensemble work, with the excellent chorus seconded by sound orchestral playing. The company's musical director, Jeffrey Kresky, who conducted this performance, alternates in that role

with the artistic director, Albert Bergeret.

Mr. Bergeret also furnished the stage direction in collaboration with Kristen Garver and with notable assistance from the choreographer, Bill Fabris, whose work accounted for much the evening's ebullience and

lift. Jack Garver's scenic design for the Piazza San Marco in Venice and the Baratarian Palace, simple and elegant, is gussied up nicely by Jan Holland's costumes.

The production continues at Symphony Space (Broadway at 95th Street) through Jan. 7.