



[Trouble in Tahiti & Trial by Jury](#)

Part of *The Little Greats*

by Opera North at the Lowry

Reviewed by [Matthew Dougall](#) November 2017

Opera North are regular and welcome visitors to Salford's showpiece at The Lowry. This time, in the Lyric Theatre, they came with something just that little bit different. An offering of 6 one-act Music Dramas, all of very differing genres and styles, and all of which rarely get to see the light of day. These are *The Little Greats*. This evening I was there to watch two of them; Leonard Bernstein's lovely 'Trouble in Tahiti', and the more satirical and comedic 'Trial By Jury' by our very own Gilbert and Sullivan.

I adore Bernstein in all his various musical incarnations from his jazzy, dance-hall popularist music to his highly classical compositions such as The Chichester Psalms and this, his one-act opera, Trouble In Tahiti. Perhaps a slightly misleading title really, since it refers to the title of a movie within the opera and the setting for the opera is a recording studio in somewhere-ville in 1950s America.

A simple but highly effective set, combined with authentic-looking props, costumes and a good lighting design formed the playground for the talented cast.

Sam and Dinah are man and wife and have hit the seven-year-itch! Things are stagnant and although both still love each other, they have difficulty communicating and find that they deliberately lie and try to avoid each other, yet neither really knows why. They find solace in the movies. Sam was played by **Quirijn De Lang** and Dinah was played by **Wallis Giunta**. Singing and acting was superb from both, and their chemistry electric.

A Greek-like chorus of all-singing and seemingly all-knowing plot-developing backing singers at the studio, sing and dance their way through the score juxtaposing their jolliness and dreams of Suburbia with the reality of a breakdown in marital communication and bliss. I loved the choreography here too, by **Tim Claydon**. The Trio were **Fflur Wyn**, **Joseph Shovelton**, and **Nicholas Butterfield**

. The couple also have a young son. It's a non-singing, non-speaking role but nevertheless important, and in this production the young boy was

Charlie Southby

After the interval we came back, and in the words of the immortal Monty Python, and now for something completely different!



Nothing can be more British or evoke the humour and nature of the British more than an operetta by W S Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan. We have lauded and adored these operettas ever since they were first performed, and are a staple of many amateur Musical society to this day. Opera North also favour the works of this composer too, and although I hadn't until this evening seen them performed by Opera North, I had heard of their brilliance.

The last time I sat down to watch a G+S was in excess of 25 years ago, and have always tried to avoid them like the plague. The music, the style, the too-clever patter lyrics, the froppery... there is just something about them which usually makes me cringe! I was therefore, wondering just exactly what my reaction to Trial By Jury, tonight's short one-act offering would be.

I was pleasantly surprised. It was excellently produced, and the use of court furniture against a backdrop of black worked very well. Once again the singing, especially in this instance the choral singing was stunning, and the whole was just about the right length for me to enjoy without getting bored of it!

The storyline, as with most G+S is a lot of nonsense formed upon a real and notable event of political interest which the duo were able to satirise; thus earning them their popularity and also notoriety. In this instance a film star is suing her lover for breach of promise to marry. In the end the judge decides to close the case early by marrying her himself.

If you love G+S, then you will love this. If you are new to G+S then this makes a superb introduction to the genre; and if, like me, you live in that half-way house, then there is still lots in it that is worth the taking; not least the lovely singing, and dammed silly acting! The large cast

included **Richard Mosley-Evans** as The Usher, **Nicholas Watts** as The Defendant, **Amy Freston** as The Plaintiff, and **Jeremy Peaker** as The Judge.

Both pieces were performed to a live, large, and wonderfully sounding orchestra, under the baton of **Oliver Rundell** (Trial By Jury) and **Tobias Ringborg** (Trouble In Tahiti). What a wonderful idea to perform these short lesser known and infrequently performed pieces back to back like this. Excellently realised and thoroughly enjoyable.