

playwrites

H.M.S. Pinafore
*Gainesville Community
 Playhouse*

Like all musicals written prior to the changes wrought by Rodgers and Hammerstein, Gilbert and Sullivan's delightful *H.M.S. Pinafore* has the frothiest of storylines and a conflict that hinges on the simplest of plot devices: mistaken identity.

Young Ralph Rackstraw (Andy Alabiso) is a square-jawed foremast hand on the *H.M.S. Pinafore* and easily the brightest sailor in the navy. But Ralph is unhappy; he is pining away for his true love, Josephine. Yet he might as well pine for the moon, for Josephine is the captain's daughter and equally out of his reach.

Little does he know that Josephine (Leslie Pruitt) reciprocates his feelings but also is hesitant about marrying under her station. This idea of love between two people of different classes is repeated in the relationship between

Little Buttercup, a peddler woman, and the captain (Bob Garrigues).

Matters are further complicated by the arrival of Sir Joseph Porter (and his sisters and his cousins and his aunts). He has come to woo Josephine. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say he has come expecting her to be won over by the mere presence of his personality.

Spitting and grumbling on the fringes of all this excitement is Dick Deadeye (David Carter). He's an exceedingly grungy sailor who doesn't believe classes should intermarry and doesn't mind saying so, even if everyone's faces do curdle with disgust whenever he opens his mouth.

H.M.S. Pinafore is a light opera and, as such, is extremely difficult to sing, but the cast does a commendable job. Leslie Pruitt has the voice best suited to this type of singing. However, what the others might occasionally lack in technical expertise, they more than

compensate for with energy and frequently hilarious delivery.

Andy Alabiso certainly has the mock-heroic pose down to perfection, while Richard Rowland and Bob Garrigues both shine in their crowd-pleasing roles as buffoons.

The costumes are bright and colorful, while the state is simply bursting with extras. Director Rebecca Kushner-Legum does a nice job of encouraging the actors to ham it up even when the action is focused elsewhere on stage, and the pacing is swift and sure. Special acknowledgment also should go to the musical ensemble, which was excellent throughout.

Though the story's resolution is silly by today's standards, the point of this feather-light operetta is not what you say but how you say it. Gilbert and Sullivan certainly knew how to say it, and their pithy lyrics keep *H.M.S. Pinafore* as charming today as it was a hundred years ago.

By Michael Giltz