

# Opera Comique On board TS Foudroyant



*The Pirates of Penzance performed on board TS Foudroyant by Opera Comique*

In the 1980s when our ship, as TS Foudroyant, was moored at Portsmouth it was used as an appropriate setting for performances by Opera Comique, based in Portsmouth. Appropriate that is because of the Gilbert and Sullivan operatic pieces chosen.

The dates of these performances by Opera Comique were:

28 <sup>th</sup> & 29 <sup>th</sup> August 1982	HMS Pinafore
27 <sup>th</sup> & 28 <sup>th</sup> August 1983	HMS Pinafore
25 <sup>th</sup> & 26 <sup>th</sup> August 1984	Pirates of Penzance
23 <sup>rd</sup> & 24 <sup>th</sup> August 1986	Pirates of Penzance
29 <sup>th</sup> & 30 <sup>th</sup> August 1987	HMS Pinafore

Do any Friends have memories of these?

I am grateful to Nigel Smith of Opera Comique for providing the photographs taken of the performances. In his email to me in June he wrote:

“... I have happy memories of those performances, all of which I was accompanist on my keyboard. The most magical part was ... that the second Act of HMS Pinafore starts with the Captain's song to the Moon, and on several occasions the moon rose over Portsmouth Harbour at exactly the right moment. It was also magical that the whole audience had to be rowed out to the ship.

What I have found is a review of one of the performances (I think 1983) in the local Portsmouth News ... Many of the cast slept on board TS Foudroyant and had some memorable nights! There were other memorable events, e.g. I remember our conductor's music blowing away into the water....

Many of the Opera Comique singers have now retired and we are currently considering future plans, but they are likely to be less ambitious as there is much less enthusiasm for Gilbert and Sullivan locally than there used to be. A few of our members, including myself, have recently been involved in a couple of performances of Trial by Jury in Beaumaris, Anglesey, where our Musical Director for the past years now lives ...”



*HMS Pinafore performed on TS Foudroyant by Opera Comique*

*From the Portsmouth News:*

## **MAGIC OF THE OPERA AFLOAT**

An enchanted evening afloat was for me not only the highspot of Maritime Portsmouth, but also one of life's most magical occasions.

Two performances only of "H.M.S. Pinafore" were given by Opera Comique over the weekend and I was lucky enough to be at the first, on a moonlit Saturday night, aboard T.S. Foudroyant.

The Italian tallship Amerigo Vespucci, twinkled beyond the deck of Foudroyant which became the natural stage of "Pinafore", curious boat-owners chugged alongside and swapped sallies with the opera's own "sailors," while night obligingly fell in the interval in time for Captain Corcoran's serenade to the moon, which opens Act Two.

This simple idea, to stage the Portsmouth-set opera at sea, turned into a spectacular success, and the only drawback was that, even with full houses at both performances, only 400 [?] could see this wonderful show.

Let's "give three cheers and one cheer more" for Opera Comique and its artistic director Kevin Sivyer, for casting the spell, and the Foudroyant for providing the means. I hope the privileged few who saw the results of this inspired partnership will urge further performances. A repeat of this marvellous experiment would be a highly suitable addition to future Portsmouth Festivals.

The highly experienced crew of soloists and chorus took only one rehearsal aboard the ship to stage this memorable "Pinafore." A brisk breeze and albeit appropriate noises off never threatened the voices of the principals of whom Vic Hill as Corcoran, Chris Doman as Sir Joseph, Vara Williams as Buttercup, Madeline Grant as Josephine and Margaret Thorpe as Hebe gave particularly striking performances.

After this success the possibilities are endless: "Yeoman of the Guard" at Southsea Castle, "Trial by Jury" in the Crown Court, or back to sea for "Gondoliers" or "The Pirates of Penzance."

Please, please let us have more of this.  
C.S.

**QD069: Originally appeared in the "Quarterdeck" magazine  
Ref: 2022 Issue 2 (Summer) pages 34 to 36**

[friendsofhmstrincomalee.org.uk](http://friendsofhmstrincomalee.org.uk)