



DI YAM GAZLONIM! (THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE)

The National Yiddish Theatre–Folksbiene at the Jewish Community Center

“Arrrg! Arrrg! Arrrg! Feh!” say the pirates of Penzance, who are actually from Zhitkowitz, in the smart production of *Di Yam Gazlonim!* by the National Yiddish Theatre–Folksbiene. Al Grand’s sly translation of William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan’s *The Pirates of Penzance* has been in the works for a while, but this marks its Off-Broadway debut. It’s fun to go back and forth between 19th-century British silliness and sarcastic, campy Yiddish remarks—and remarkably smooth.

There are English and Russian supertitles, but what New Yorker doesn’t know “schlep” and “mazel tov?” Turning “Woe is me” into “Oy vey” doubles the chuckle.

The story of the apprentice pirate Frederick, here called Fayvl (Jacob Feldman), who woos the daughter of the Major General, Mabel, here called Malke (Dani Marcus), only to discover that because he was born on leap year he won’t be free until 1960, is intact. A modern major general (strongly played and sung by Stephen Mo Hanan) who boasts that he can “dance the hora while he plays the harmonica” and sing a little bit of “Rumania” is new, though. Marcus is pert, with a lilting coloratura; the Pirate King, or Groyser Gazlen (Steve Sterner), is droll, and the flat-footed policemen are a riot—particularly director Allen Lewis Rickman as the Sergeant of Police. Penny Ayn Maas’ inventive choreography is effective. The energetic cast charms, but could stand a bit more Gilbert deadpan and a bit less Yiddish schmaltz.

The production look is British, not Yiddish, with a nostalgic painted backdrop and cardboard wing pieces (set by Vicki Davis), and rich, bright costumes (by K. Laurinda Wilson). The abbreviated Folksbiene band, including musical director Zalmen Mlotek on piano, nicely impersonates a larger orchestra. *Di Yam Gazlonim!* is canny, clever, and an awfully good time.

Presented by the National Yiddish Theatre–Folksbiene

at the Jewish Community Center, 334 Amsterdam Ave., NYC.

Nov. 5–12. Wed., Thu., and Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 6 p.m.; Wed., Thu., and Sun., 2 p.m.

(212) 279-4200 or www.ticketcentral.com.

Reviewed by Gwen Orel

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