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**Bristol Amateur Operatic Society. 'Seven Brides For Seven Brothers'**  
**Victoria Rooms, Bristol March 2007**  
**Director – John Cousins M.D. – Kerrie Duce Choreographer – Jacqui Bell**

Based on the MGM 1954 film, nominated for Best Picture Oscar, with music by Saul Chaplin and Gene de Paul, with lyrics by Johnny Mercer, the story tells of seven brothers. Adam, the eldest, marries Milly, who tries to tame his six unruly brothers, who manage to get themselves banished from the town and from the girls that they love. After being humiliated by the townsfolk, they kidnap the girls and take them home, an avalanche preventing the town from following. Forgetting to kidnap a preacher to marry them, they have to wait for spring, whereupon the townsfolk turn up and hastily arrange shotgun weddings, little knowing that all the couples have fallen in love anyway! This musical is not one of the most popular choices for amateur companies, maybe because of the need to find at least 14 lead actors/actresses, not to mention the suitors and townsfolk! BAOS produced a superb cast with boundless talent and enthusiasm, which, along with a superb two storey set, extremely imaginative lighting, excellent costumes, and original, energetic choreography and orchestrations, made an extremely memorable production. Pete Jones, (Adam) and Kristy Bennett (Milly) gave particularly fine performances, but the entire cast gave their all. An ambitious and thoroughly enjoyable production.

**Sharon Wood**  
**NODA Regional Representative**  
**District 2a**

**National Operatic and Dramatic Association**

Patron: The Lord Lloyd-Webber

Registered as a charity number 254640 VAT registration number 232 5945 62  
NODA House, 58-60 Lincoln Road, Peterborough PE1 2RZ  
Tel 0870 770 2480 Fax 0870 770 2490 [everyone@noda.org.uk](mailto:everyone@noda.org.uk) [www.noda.org.uk](http://www.noda.org.uk)



**Staging:** The use of the gauze to open the show was very effective but the wood and brick effect raised to reveal, left me quite puzzled as to what it actually represented. The change to the rest much better and perhaps it would have been a better set to start the show with? Adam's double set was superb, giving plenty of opportunities for good groupings and pictures within and around it. Dressing was excellent really representing the era and the way the Pontipee's lived, with the level range and sink at the house, barrels, bottles, cans, baskets etc. Suitcases, firearms, pewter tankards added authenticity and were handled confidently by the cast. The only problem with the house scene table, which was set at such an angle that half of the brothers had their backs to the audience when they sat down, and the other brothers were masked! Could it have been at much more of an angle, or set differently? The barn scene was very impressive, and the bunting at the dance hall depicted where we were, simply and effectively. The biggest problem of the production seemed to be the lowering the backcloths and the gauze. Practically every time they were used, they came down a far too fast, catching on scenery, and banging onto the stage. They should have been much more controlled in their movement, for safety's sake if nothing else! The cast also disregarded the backcloths as they entered and exits, which made the curtains positively billow at times!

**Lighting:** This was a very ambitious and original lighting plot, which gave wonderful effects and enhanced the production greatly. The use of colours was varied and imaginative. I loved the 'silhouetting' of the actors which, with the actors in an excellent freeze, gave a stunning effect. 'Goin' Courtin' was particularly good with the use of individual spots, (most noticeably in 'Love Never Goes Away'), was superb and the silhouetting with the beautiful turquoise lighting was wonderful. There were some instances where the colour was almost too vivid, (namely the barn sequence with pink, green and yellow lighting) and I must mention the lighting of the gauze which seemed beset by problems. It worked well at the beginning, but in subsequent scene changes, the gauze and its backing cloth seemed to be backlit, giving us a clear view of the stage crew behind, as they busied themselves changing the sets, and totally undermining the effect of the gauze in place in front of the curtain, which was a real shame as it was quite distracting. Overall though, the lighting schedule was very well devised and a highly effective part of the production.

**Music:** The fourteen piece orchestra led by Miss Kerrie Duce played expertly and with gusto through well known melodies. All vocals had obviously been extremely well rehearsed and there were some highlights, ('Wonderful Day', 'One Man', 'Goin' Courtin', 'Love Never Goes Away', 'Sobbin' Woman Ought to Know Her Place', 'Spring, Spring, Spring' and 'Glad That You Were Born Here' - memorable for me!). These songs are rarely heard these days, so when they are performed as well as they were in this production, they bring even more enjoyment to the audience.

**Choreography:** Superb and imaginative choreography throughout, sometimes reminiscent of musical theatre itself! Beautifully danced and obviously extremely well rehearsed, the routines were energetic and vibrant, the fight scenes etc, were realistic and believable and gave much to the production. Excellent!

**Sound:** Apart from a few glitches with the mikes, particularly during 'Lonesome Polecat' and 'Spring, Spring', which were fairly quickly corrected, the overall balance was good, the orchestra was not overpowered the vocals and there were some nice effects, (I loved the avalanche!).

**Costumes:** Another aspect of this production that had been very well thought out and executed. The costumes were totally accurate for the period and the story, as were the hairstyles of the ladies. The jacket was far too small for her at the beginning and she would have worn thick woollen stockings and boots, but other than that and the fact that far more winter clothing would have been donned by her in such a fearful snowstorm, the costume schedule was excellent. I liked the brothers' outfits, both before and after they were 'cleaned up', the girls dresses were beautiful and the townsfolk and suitors look authentic. A good costume schedule that greatly enhanced the production.

**Individual Performances:**

**Adam:** A superb stage presence and strong vocals made this a totally believable portrayal. You stage well and brought a sense of authority and stubbornness that captured the character exactly.

**Milly:** You managed to portray the strength *and* vulnerability of this complex character. With vocals, good body language and facial expressions, you gave a sensitive and accomplished perform

**The Brothers – Benjamin, Caleb, Daniel, Ephraim, Frank and Gideon:** It is so difficult individual comments on these characters without being repetitive! You worked *so* well as a team totally believable brothers – one moment you'd be fighting between yourselves, whilst the next minute be backing each other to the hilt! You all had superb vocal and dance ability, and your 'Goin' Cc hilarious! The fight scenes at the dance hall and the kidnap scenes were superbly executed obviously taken much rehearsal time to perfect. Though you all portrayed individual character well, your strength lay in being able to work as one team and you achieved this admirably.

**The Girls – Dorcas, Ruth, Liza, Martha, Sarah and Alice:** As with the brothers, your forte was together as a tight group and in this, you were all totally convincing. You portrayed the innocent naivety of the girls extremely well and all managed to depict the transformation from the indignation through to the eventual lovebirds beautifully. Your vocals and dance routines were expertly executed and you all worked extremely well as a 'sisterhood'!

**The Suitors – Carl, Luke, Matt, Joel, Zeke and Jeb:** Suitably arrogant to begin with, when you realised that your 'sweethearts' wouldn't look twice at the Pontipee brothers, you all portrayed great individuality their subsequent betrayal! I'm sure that you even managed to gain a lot of sympathy from the audience. Your dance and fight scenes were excellent and once again, you all managed to portray individual characters whilst gelling superbly as a group.

**The Townsfolk:** Excellent characterisation, (in particular Mrs Bixby and The Preacher), projection and body language throughout. 'The Townsfolk Lament' was superb and each one of you gave a believable portrayal.

This production was a visual delight with accomplished acting, sparkling dance routines and superb singing. Though there were obvious technical problems, they did not detract too much from the overall success of the show. This was an accomplished production of a musical that is rarely performed by amateur groups, probably because of the complexities of finding at least 14 strong leads, to play the Pontipee brothers and their brides, not to mention the suitors and the townsfolk! BAOS were happily able to cast all the roles admirably and gave an immensely enjoyable interpretation of this superb musical.

Thank you so much for inviting me to your production which I thoroughly enjoyed. My congratulations to all concerned and I look forward to your next venture.

Best wishes

**Sharon Wood**  
NODA Regional Representative  
Area 2A