

Trial by jury goes before the public

by Glenn Walton

"There was a guy who'd asked his girl to marry him. Later, he wanted out because he found 'doll' to his liking. The first girl hauled him into court, with all her girl friends along to help. They blasted him as being a regular rat, to which his only defence was that "birds do it, bees do it" so why on earth shouldn't he do it? This didn't impress the judge. The guy then said that when he hit the bottle he'd likely hit his girl; and surely the Court wouldn't want that to happen. This was recognized as a reasonable excuse and the judge suggested it be put to the test. This made the guy smile with pleasure but made everyone else mad.

"The judge got fed up with the whole mess and made another, and unusual, suggestion which solved the whole problem."

If the foregoing sounds a bit mundane to you, wait till you see it dressed up in Victorian frippery in the upcoming Gilbert and Sullivan production of **Trial by Jury** at QEH this Saturday night. **Trial by Jury**, according to the Society's own publicist, is "a melodious burlesque containing the observations and astute perceptions of Sir William Gilbert, himself a member of the British bar, on the foibles and follies of the British system of justice, which he dissects and mocks with rare perpicacity."

The Gilbert and Sullivan Society has existed in Halifax since 1967 when A.G. Scott-Savage advertised his intention

to form a society for the performance of the entirely silly and thoroughly delightful operettas that have been a mainstay of musical and theatrical life in England and the colonies since the late 1800's. It is perhaps hard for an outsider to understand the enthusiasm of being a member of a G & S society, which not only stages works but puts out a journal (in Halifax **The Katisha Scream**) devoted solely to G & S history, anecdote and lore, sponsors films and lectures, and so on. It's almost a type of fanaticism says Susan Lally, publicity chairman of the Nova Scotia Gilbert and Sullivan Society. "You get to the

point when you're having a conversation with another Savoyard (named after the Savoy that was built by D'oily Catre solely for G & S productions) and you adopt the G & S vocabulary. For instance Gilbert originated the expression "There's lots of good fish in the sea." and "What never? Well, hardly ever." It's a world of its own, and a lot of fun. It's such a relief after a day's work to enter the world of G & S because it's refreshingly bright, merry music to sing. Gilbert and Sullivan really are "Masters of Mirth and Melody."

The society has grown from a membership of 45 in its first

year to its present membership of 75, many of whom are now die-hard fans. Whereas the society went from home to home, rehearsing in one place and building sets in another, they are now ensconced in St. George's Church on Brunswick Street. Most G & S productions were staged at St. Pat's auditorium, but last May the society procured Neptune Theatre for **Patience**. This week's production, part of a provincial tour, is at Queen Elizabeth High. Productions are funded partly by provincial and city grants, but the nature of the society is voluntary. "The society itself does all its own administration,

construction of sets, costumes, and all the thousands of little things involved in theatrical productions. We're able to get by then on ticket sales and private donations, which is unusual for a theatrical production," Lally said.

This is the first time that Dal students will be able to see a G & S production, since they were formerly put on in May, when students were out of school for the summer. **Trial by Jury** is a light hearted romp, full of funny lines and toe-tapping hummable tunes, and law students would find the breach-of-promise-of-marriage trial interesting, since they'll never get to try a case like it, although they were quite common in England in the last century.

Besides **Trial by Jury**, the evening will feature excerpts from other G & S productions such as **HMS Pinafore**, and **Pirates of Penzance**. Normally the society does one major production a year in Halifax, but Lally added that the society has taken the show on the road to Annapolis, Tantallon, besides performing for the senior citizens at Northwood Centre. The society promises Joy Unbounded to those who make it to QE this Saturday and let themselves be transported into the particularly merry world of G & S. If past performances are any indication, the promise will be fulfilled.



Seen here are Gilbert and Sullivan performers in a scene from the forthcoming **Trial by Jury** at QEH this Saturday. From left to right are Elizabeth Gibbs, Richard Circom, Sue Taylor and Louis Church.



From new wave to country, Costello still turns on

by Michael Brennan

Elvis Costello is one of the most important rock performers today. He has produced consistently inspired and biting rock'n'roll since his first album in 1977. This new release, **Almost Blue**, is a slight departure from his previous work, with Costello performing his favourite country hits from Hank Williams to George Jones. But it is every bit as rewarding.

Don't let the country and western turn you off. The fact that Costello was to cover country classics on his new record turned me on. Pure country and western has the edge and power of the very best rock and roll, and has infected all great rock and rollers. On this album Costello gives us some fired and honestly passionate performances that capture the spirit and drive of the originals, yet leave a definite mark of his own. At times he does lose that simple touch that gives country its plain, raw sound, but when he's on, the album really kicks.

It is the sincere intensity of simple personal sentiments that makes strong country music. When Costello captures it, he more than does country music

justice. The opening cut, a roaring rendition of Hank Williams' "Why Don't You Love Me (Like You Used to Do?)" is certainly the best. For the full minute and forty-eight seconds Costello and the Attractions play at a furious speed, giving off a wild energy. Costello spits out the lyrics in his tough, punkish manner. Instead of the inherent desperation of Hank's original, Costello makes it a completely angry, outspoken answer to the lover. He also changes the melody, making it a real Costello number in the tradition of "Mystery Dance". Few performers can match the gut power of Hank Williams, but here Elvis comes quite close.

Next to that, however, there are few real rockers, most of the songs being slow ballads. Of these, only George Jones' "Colour of the Blues", and "Too Far Gone" stand out, and they lack the country sensibility that I had hoped for. Elvis's reading of them is spirited, but musically they have little distinction and become bland in comparison with the honest rural flavour of the originals.

Nevertheless, there are three other numbers that make the

record more than worthwhile. Merle Haggard's "Tonight the Bottle Let Me Down" is a swinging, ruggedly emotional song with a great country feel, piercing pedal-steel guitar and all. I doubt that Costello uses "the bottle" with the same necessity that many of the honky-tonk singers do in forgetting their troubles, but the vitality he gives this number makes it every bit as valid. On Charlie Rich's "Sitting and Thinking" Elvis is equally stirring, expressing a surrender and helplessness with a strong subtlety. The beat moves easily but with force, and Steve Nieve's piano fills are perfect. The band adds their tight, lively sound wonderfully, making the number distinctly their own. Costello understands the straightforward, clear emotion of these country performers and the simple honesty of their pain. He gives them the force of his own best numbers. There is a direct similarity in his own expressions of loss and alienation. "Honey Hush", the second last number on the album, is another driving, irritated attack on a lover: "Come on honey, stop that yakety-yak," pouts

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