

## **Orpheus Down Under: The Theatre, Chipping Norton**

4:33pm Wednesday 3rd March 2010

**Nicola Lisle, Oxford Times**

A seedy 1970s pub, a wild beach party ‘down under’ and a bunch of rebellious gods and goddesses may not sound like the traditional ingredients of Orpheus in the Underworld. But this is Unexpected Opera, a delightfully zany, witty and inventive company that sends up well-known operas in such good-humoured style that even the most hardened purist must surely succumb to their affectionately irreverent approach. Here Offenbach’s classic is restyled as Orpheus Down Under, where the deities are in training for the Olympics, with Jupiter as their relentless task master. Mayhem ensues when the deities rebel against Jupiter’s rigorous training regime and unappetising diet. Into this chaos comes Eunice, wife of Orpheus, who has been poisoned by Pluto – disguised as folk singer Arty – so that he can claim her for himself.

The irony of producing a pastiche of an opera that was itself originally a pastiche of another opera – Gluck’s Orfeo e Eurydice – is all part of the humour of this highly enjoyable rewrite, and the plot makeover works surprisingly well. It all adds up to an evening of good, clean – well, fairly clean – entertainment, propelled along at a cracking pace by an energetic and talented cast.

Rónan Busfield – a former choral scholar at [Magdalen College](#) – raised a laugh the minute he walked onstage with his nerdy, bespectacled Orpheus, and his terrible violin-playing, which so annoys his long-suffering wife Eunice, was brilliantly done. Not an easy task for someone who clearly can actually play the instrument rather well! Myvanwy Bentall sang and acted strongly as Eunice, Joseph Morgan gave a lively performance as Pluto, Matthew Quirk was suitably detestable as the hypocritical, philandering Jupiter, and the company’s resident comedian, Tony Harris (Bacchus) indulged in an audience participation session, which chiefly involved a ‘Can-Can’ singalong.

So, an unconventional Orpheus, but a thoroughly irresistible one. If this company comes this way again, do catch them if you can. For more information, visit [www.unexpectedopera.com](http://www.unexpectedopera.com).