



Cambridge Youth Opera perform Purcell's Dido and Aeneas.

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THE standard of youth theatre productions never ceases to amaze me, writes Cambridge First editor Rose Taylor.

Monday night's *Dido and Aeneas*, performed by the newly formed Cambridge Youth Opera at St Mary's School, in Bateman Street, Cambridge, was one such example.

It was brilliant by any measure - never mind that it was the debut performance put on by 12 to 18-year-olds who had grouped just six months ago to form the city's first Youth Opera.

What was even more impressive was that the choreography, costumes and set were all largely down to the effort of the youngsters.

Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* is one of the earliest English operas written

in the 17th century and the decision, therefore, to set it in the 1950s was probably a bold yet clever one.

Considering the cast had never performed a staged opera before, Beth James, the sorceress, was outstanding, as was Caitlin Goering, who played Dido, and Teddy Day, as Aeneas.

Dido's ladies, the four witches, the spirit and sailor, the chorus and dancers all played their parts to perfection.

Credit for the success of the opera is, in no small part, due to the excellent orchestra led by Chesterton Community College's director of music Yvonne Williamson.

I arrived at the performance after a day's work and admit to being a reluctant member of the audience - but not

for long. I was soon wide awake and enjoying every minute of it.

Cambridge Youth Opera was the brainchild of director Caroline Coetzee and musical director Yvonne Williamson, together with choral expert Roger Bond and vocal coach Julia Caddick. The team wanted to make opera accessible to young people.

Ms Coetzee said: "We also wanted to make people realise that opera is more than just singing."

And Cambridge Youth Opera's performance certainly was. It had pathos, humour, excellent acting and great singing.

The team are planning their next production for spring 2013.