



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : ELODS
Production : Curtains
Date : 07/04/2022
Venue : Wyllyotts Theatre
Report by : Paul M Holgate

Show Report

This late piece by Kander and Ebb was an interesting choice. It has a meandering plot, bordering on the unintelligible; has just one number that is well known out of context (*Show People*); and the denouement is rather long drawn-out. Still “the play’s the thing” and this was a colourful and busy production, well suited to this company’s talents.

Music was under the expert direction of Mark Newport and there was an exemplary balance between the pit and the stage throughout. Chorus was well drilled, and enunciation was good – important in a show that is less well known.

The opening scene, with its central performance by Jessica Cranshaw played by Alison Hall got the piece off to a good start and set the pace for a production in which ensemble pieces were pleasingly choreographed by Paula Bland and tautly directed by Gail Ashwell

Set design suited the production and there was a good selection of costumes. Show girl costumes were badly matched and needed to be more uniform. The beginning of *A Tough Act to Follow* really needed some backstage paraphernalia – i.e. sandbags or ropes – to set the scene.

LX plot was generally sound although there was a straw wash during *Kansasland* which made faces look sickly. *Thataway* was an outstanding number, as was *It’s a Business* and *Show People*. The point behind the various rewrites of *In the Same Boat* got a little lost in the mix though all were well staged, and the completed version was a suitable showstopper. The climactic standoff between Cioffi and Grady was exceptionally well presented. The split scene with the catwalk while the chorus rehearsed ‘below’ was also well blocked.

Philip Halpin was an excellent Lt. Frank Cioffi – fully in character throughout and very convincing. Jude Stoughton played Niki Harris with impressive joie de vivre. While she and Halpin seemed an unlikely couple, I thought that this really added to the plot as one was left wondering whether the ‘naïve’ Niki was, in fact, stringing Frank along to divert suspicion. *A Tough Act to Follow* was beautifully presented.

Hayley Bater as Georgia Hendricks, sung the challenging – and somewhat discordant - *Thinking of Him* with great ease and also took a good part in *Kansasland*. She was well matched with Nic Corden’s lovelorn Aaron Fox who sung the plaintive *I Miss the Music* with great feeling although the subplot of his estrangement from Georgia was, otherwise, underplayed.

Bobby Pepper, played by Kieran Newport confesses that he really does love Georgia, though he failed to demonstrate this. Possibly his bored expression during the pas de deux with Bambi was testament to his true feelings for Georgia. He certainly seemed to come more to life when dancing alone; at which he was extremely proficient.

Claudia Lynch brought a great deal of enthusiasm to the role of Bambi, petulant when sparring with her impossible mother and demonstrating laudable dancing skills during the musical numbers.

Natalie O'Sullivan was a suitably brash Carmen Bernstein, with a top-notch American accent. Never upstaged, she was clearly revelling in the part and was always the centre of attention. She was given solid support by Richard Hutchinson as a gruff Oscar Shapiro and Steve Milligan, ably portraying Sydney Bernstein.

Roger Bunnage displayed excellent comic timing as the camp Christopher Belling. Also of note was John Lynch's long-suffering Johnny Harmon. I have definitely worked with stage managers like that.

The programme was a neat design with contents that were easy to read. It is always good to see some rehearsal photographs. Be wary of reusing old material (the "potted history asserts" that Chitty Chitty Bang Bang was your most recent production at Wyllyotts). Thank you for including the NODA logo. Please consider entering your programme for the annual competition. Details are on the website.

Thank you for an entertaining evening. I wish you every success with Me and My Girl in October.