



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : ELODS
Production : On the Town
Date : 1 May 2019
Venue : Wyllyotts Theatre
Report by : Paul M Holgate

Show Report

Presented in Bernstein's centenary year; this show, with book by long-time collaborators Comden and Green is one of the most ambitious pieces that I have seen this society perform. While the plot is thin, the piece is packed with incident, giving a lot of opportunity for individual characterisation from both principals and chorus.

Musical support directed from the keyboard by Mark Newport was to the usual high standard. The brassy score did obscure voices from the stage on several occasions. Men's chorus need to pay more attention to enunciation.

The set, showing the Manhattan skyline was effective and the trucks depicting fairground booths and shop windows worked well though the subway set did make it appear as if passengers were seated on the outside of the carriage! The museum scene was particularly well realised. I thought the easel and boards was a wonderful idea. The 'taxi' worked brilliantly. The reversible tablecloths for the two clubs were a nice idea but looked untidy.

LX/FX effects worked well with superb lighting on Diamond Eddy's Spots were late up a couple of times, notably at the opening of *Come up to My Place*. A moving lighting effect on the subway scenes may have with helped the illusion of motion. The opening scene should have had starker colours to emphasise the early hour. The straw wash during *So Long, Baby* at Diamond Eddie's was unflattering, making the performers look ill. The background noise over the subway scenes was too far forward in the mix at times.

Costuming and make up generally conformed to period. A few of the male chorus had footwear that looked too modern. Stockings with seams for the ladies should have been much more in evidence. There was a clear hemline order with skirts on the knee as befitted the 1940s. A couple of the sailors had ill-fitting trousers.

Sarah Henderson, making her company debut in the director's chair, had set the piece with a relentless pace. Most action was brought well downstage. *Coney Island* was an excellent stage picture as was the show stopping *Ya Got Me*. Exits looked cramped on occasions especially in several scenes that involved cross-overs. I appreciate that you do have a lot of people to move through a small space and artistes caught in the tail-end of the hugger-mugger did remember to stay in character and keep moving with a purpose. The chase, that occurs at several stages in the action lacked pointing and the joke of more and more characters joining the pursuit was somewhat thrown away.

The many ballet and dance numbers, choreographed by Samuel Haughton, used the performing area well with good positioning for chorus members. Some of the mimes were hard to follow.

Chorus department was good. Poses were maintained well during the several freezes required. The mimed vignettes during the early morning subway ride were an inspired idea and well portrayed. Some of the more

highly stylised dance numbers lacked precision with some dancers pulling focus. Artistes were shuffling on to marks at the introduction to *New York New York* and the men's chorus into the reprise of *New York New York* required more attack. *I Feel Like I'm Not Out of Bed Yet* was superbly performed.

There was a very strong principal cast.

Jude Stoughton was a very engaging Ivy and gave a sparkling performance of the *Carnegie Hall Pavane*. . The *Miss Turnstiles Presentation* was another highlight, including a spirited introduction from John Stivey. Steve Berman was an appealing Gabey, well matched with Ivy and with good stage presence though he struggled a little with the demanding *Lonely Town*. *Lucky to be Me* worked better. He maintained character well throughout the first part of the second act where he has little to do apart from reacting to others.

Nic Corden as the wide-eyed Chip created a believable character and had good reactions to others. *Come up to my place* worked extremely well. Sunny Carter as Hildy Esterhazy gave an extremely nuanced performance with a brilliant New York accent which did not falter, even during the energetic *I can cook too*.

Corinne Roberts as Claire De Loone brought her considerable vocal talent to the fore during *Carried Away* and was a good match for Roger Bunnage, whose very physical style of performance was perfect for the part of Ozzie. Roger's startled reaction and Corrine's simpering attitude during the several appearances of Pitkin were a joy to watch. *Some Other Time* was very soulful with good positioning for the singers and sympathetic lighting.

Stephen Milligan gave another sterling performance, displaying perfect comic timing as the cuckolded Judge Pitkin and performing *I Understand* with great gusto.

Debbly Connor was well in character as the permanently sozzled and totally dotty Madame Dilly – every liquor-soaked line delivered with conviction.

Also of note was Mark Tobin as an ebullient master of ceremonies and Samantha Stringle – barely recognisable as the sniffing Lucy Schmeeler. I also enjoyed Emily Kennedy-Neal's lugubrious portrayal of Diana Dream/Dolores Dolores; she packed a lot of character into two short scenes.

The programme was a neat design with several intriguing photographs and a good potted history of the society. Cast photos were clear. The double asterisk next to *Lonely Town* in the list of musical numbers must have mystified some readers (I think I know how it got there). Thank you for including a NODA credit. Please consider entering your programmes and posters for the annual competition.

Many thanks for your invitation and your kind hospitality. I look forward to seeing future presentations by your society.

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