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Society: ELODS
District: L07
Production: OKLAHOMA!
Date: Saturday 18 October 2025
Venue: Wyllotts Theatre
Report By: Thomas Lennon

Show Report

General

This is now my sixth trip to Potters Bar to attend a production by ELODS and, as with every show I attend, I am always filled with anticipation as I arrive at the theatre. It doesn't matter how well one knows a show or how often you have seen it, it is always exciting to see a different company's perspective.

Following its recent revival in London, Rodgers & Hammerstein's **OKLAHOMA!** has seen a noticeable return to the amateur circuit over eighty years after its original Broadway opening when it was credited with ushering in a new era of musical theatre. Even in 2025, this American classic is still relevant.

Front of House

In the period I have regularly attended this theatre, the only obvious difference appears to be the limited amount of space available for displays for the company within the foyer.

There were the usual handful of volunteers mingling with their patrons encouraging them to buy programmes and raffle tickets.

As always, a generous number of committee members and creatives made time to come and chat with me before, during the interval and after the performance.

Programme

As with their last production, the company had produced a 28-page glossy programme with artwork by **Roger Bunnage** and designed by **Naomi Delamore**.

Contents included the usual note from the Chair, lists for the musical numbers, the production team, the band, the Committee, previous productions and a generous array of advertisements for other company productions in the future.

The remaining space was allocated to company photographs and biographies which contained more information on individual's past and future roles, which was very enlightening.

Players

Maddie Stoughton, in this her tenth production with the company, portrayed a refreshing innocence in *Laurey Williams* which was touching yet she had an air of indifference in her interactions with *Curly* to mask her true feelings for him. Her pleasing vocal and her dance ability made her an ideal casting in this role and a promising prospect for future roles with any company.

Players (*continued*)

As he strode in from stage left in full voice, **Archie Beach** oozed a confidence as *Curly McLain* that was evident in his voice, stance and his demeanour. He knew he was a catch and yet, like *Laurey*, was reluctant to let her know he was besotted with her, outwardly showing more interest in being a cowboy to impress others and trying to make her jealous.

Maddie and Archie worked well together and complimented each other vocally.

Returning to the stage after a short sabbatical, **Claire Svoboda** was an all seeing and knowing *Aunt Eller*, who was well respected in the community, which was evidenced in their insistence of her to lead the auction. She had good stage presence and her delivery of dialogue was confident, particularly during the auction.

Bethany Newport, another regular company member, gave a spirited interpretation to *Ado Annie* with good comic instincts. Despite her heart being set on *Will Parker* she was easily distracted by any sweet-talking male who showed her interest. Her summation of the issue was delivered with gusto in her rendition of 'I Cain't Say No!'.

Theo Hughes brought a youthful enthusiasm to *Will Parker* with good stage presence and charm. His determination to win the \$50 to secure *Ado Annie's* hand in marriage was only marred by his dim-witted desperation to shower her with gifts – leaving him penniless again – which he seemed oblivious to. His confident vocal was highlighted in his performance of 'Kanas City'.

Bethany and Theo had a good rapport which made their interactions endearing.

Greg Wedge had a menacing look in his interpretation of *Jud Fry* to add to his hunched stance and measured gait. He maintained his character well throughout, never once showing any level of weakness and was equally determined in his obsession for *Laurey* and his contempt for *Curly*. A measured performance in this pivotal role.

Mirza Malik inhabited the flamboyant persona of the clean-cut Persian peddler man *Ali Hakim*. His suave charm, cheeky smile and womanising ways were like cat nip to the territory females. His dalliances with the locals had both comedic and desperate memorable occasions.

Ellie Brunton was both annoying and lovable in equal measure as *Gertie Cummings*. She utilised her limited stage time to make an impression with her high-pitched cackle that was unmistakable and bagged herself a husband in the process.

The roles of *Andrew Carnes*, *Cord Ellam*, *Slim* and *Ike Skidmore*, who supported the leads in the main group scenes were covered by **Stephen Milligan**, **Roger Bunnage**, **Zach Anstee** and **Nic Corden** respectively and brought an authentic territory feel to the proceedings.

Ensemble

Vocally, the company created a wall of sound with crisp diction and tight harmonies. Likewise, movement had been rehearsed to a good standard and the well-spaced numbers made use of all the available performance space.

Costumes

There was a very generous yet broad selection of costumes, facilitated by **Deborah Porton** and **Sophie Shoults**, which were drawn from several periods which for me detracted slightly from the piece. Lots of checks, denim, though too many shades of, and gingham which I expected however some polka dots and paisley I had not.

The brown leather jacket for *Will Parker* and the suits and shoes for *Ali Hakim* were too modern for the period of the piece.

Sets & Props

The stage had been preset with a minimum of items to represent the exterior yard of Aunt Eller and Laurey's home with a clothesline, a rocking chair and a replica farm windmill with some corn growing behind it at upstage right and a white picket fence at upstage left. There were also tabs to represent tress and foliage.

The main performance space had a map of the territory on the floor at its centre though I'm not sure it was obvious to the patrons and the space was dressed accordingly with appropriate minimal items, bales, boxes and benches, as required.

The handcart for *Ali Hakim* and the Surrey were both notable items.

Stage Management

Mark Fitzgerald, assisted by **Kym Houlihan**, made light work of the setting and striking of each of the required elements for the various scenes – a definite advantage to a minimalist set and proving it can be done.

Lighting

John Castle devised and operated a lighting plot that generously covered all the performance space while also managing to tighten focus on the smaller scenes when required. Being no stranger to this venue, he utilised the available kit to his advantage. He was ably assisted in his task by **Adrian Rammage**, **Del Sanders** and **Molly Wells**.

Sound

The sound plot, devised by **Jacob Holmes**, was executed to ensure a balanced level of audio was experienced by each member of the audience during the production.

Orchestra

Consisting of ten musicians in total, the orchestra included the following instruments, piano, flute / piccolo, clarinet, clarinet / bass clarinet, trumpet x 2, trombone, violin, bass and drums / percussion.

Musical Director

From the first note of the Overture to the very last note of the Finale, **Mark Newport** kept his assembled team on their toes providing precision accompaniment to the principals and ensemble. Additionally, he had drilled the company in their respective harmonies to deliver us an exciting musical and vocal combination of this Rodgers and Hammerstein classic score.

Choreographer

Jemma Hickman had her hands full devising the array of musical numbers for this production. She used simple but effective routines in main chorus numbers with more stylised but not overly complicated routines for 'Kansas City' and 'Many A New Day' and well within the capabilities of the company members. In the Dream Ballet she held our attention with the drama of the piece.

Director

John Hebden had chosen some younger company members when casting his principals and it was encouraging to see them tackle their roles head on under his direction. Pace was good with plenty of business for the ensemble. His groupings were well thought out and provided a balanced aesthetic for patrons while the short appearance of the Surrey was delightful during the finale.

NODA Website Production Summary

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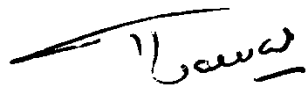
... simple but effective routines in main chorus numbers with more stylised but not overly complicated routines for 'Kansas City' and 'Many A New Day'.

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My thanks to Emma and her committee for the invitation. I am always made to feel very welcome at Wylllyotts and I look forward to seeing you all again at a future production.

Sincerely,



THOMAS LENNON

District L07 Regional Representative
NODA London

NODA London Poster & Programme Competition:

Should the company wish to enter either competition, please refer to the London section of the main NODA website at the following location;

<https://www.noda.org.uk/regions/london/noda-london-poster-programme-competition>

for eligibility criteria, rules and entry forms for both.

Entries are now being accepted for productions between 01 January 2025 and 31 December 2025.

Significant Dates For Your Diary:

Regional Celebration Day 2026

Sunday 14 June 2026

NODA Theatre Summer School 2026

Saturday 01 August 2026 to Saturday 08 August 2026

NODA AGM & Presidential Gala 2026

September 2026

