

## **National Operatic and Dramatic Association**

### **London Region**

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**Society:** ELODS  
**Production:** SISTER ACT  
**Date:** Thursday 17 October 2024  
**Venue:** Wylyotts Theatre  
**Report By:** Thomas Lennon

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### **Show Report**

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#### **General**

As musicals go, this show, based on the 1992 hit film with Whoopi Goldberg, is but a teenager only having its West End premiere in 2009. The production opened at the London Palladium and included Patina Miller, Sheila Hancock and Ian Lavender in the original cast. Since then, it has had a string of productions worldwide while earlier this year there was a London revival at the Dominion Theatre with Ruth Jones in the role of the Mother Superior.

It has also proved an extremely popular choice for societies following its release on the amateur circuit across the United Kingdom and Ireland.

#### **Front of House**

The society took full advantage to utilise some of the main foyer space within the venue with a dedicated display of production information and photographs which helped to generate an air of anticipation among the assembled individuals ahead of the evening's performance.

The society also had a group of volunteers, led by **Angela Edmunds**, who were extremely busy selling programmes and tickets to their loyal audience. A separate display of the raffle prizes was also in place.

#### **Programme**

This was a 14-page A5 booklet, including the front cover, a replica of the production poster and the rear cover, which comprised an advert for the society's production of **ANYTHING GOES** in May 2025.

The contents comprised of a note from the Chair, details of the production team, the musical numbers, the creative team, cast biographies, ensemble member details, the band and the society committee information. There was also a selection of rehearsal photographs, a detailed list of the previous productions, a handful of business advertisements and a full page allocated to NODA.

#### **Players**

**Sim Marsh-Henry** proved a spirited *Deloris van Cartier* though it took her a short time to get into her stride. Her desperation to evade the clutches of her crime boss boyfriend was reasonable while her performance when leading the nuns in their group numbers had gusto and an appealing vocal. A rounded representation of the character in general.

**Sandra Ashworth** as *Mother Superior* had great stage presence and looked both comfortable and believable in her role. Her characterisation proved that there was more to this nun than the initial serious exterior that met the eye. Her comic timing in her spoken delivery was flawless with good diction and projection, particularly in her moments of seeking divine guidance while also holding her own with her singing. An impressive performance from a talented individual.

#### **Players (continued)**

**Stephen Milligan** brought a sense of joviality to *Monsignor O'Hara*. The original monetary gain for hiding the witness was obviously surpassed by his sheer enjoyment of the new life injected into the parish with the rising popularity of the choir and the possibility of avoiding the sale of the church / convent. His amusing instances of narration, peppered through the evening, were well received.

Both Sandra and Stephen complimented each other within their shared scenes in the production.

**Maddie Stoughton** was ideal casting and her petite stature worked in tandem with her timid portrayal of *Sister Mary Robert*. Her gradual rise to prominence within the show was measured and showed great stagecraft obviously honed from previous show experiences yet seldom found in a performer of her age.

**Steve Berman** as *Lt Eddie Souther*, (*Sweaty Eddie*), impressed with the balance of his portrayal. He showed confidence in his position as the police officer yet was intimidated by his old school friend when she realised who he was. His rendition of “I Could Be That Guy” showed his desire to impress and proved an audience pleaser with clever costume transitions.

**Roger Bunnage** brought his considerable experience to the role of *Curtis* and was well costumed / accessorised to look the part of the crime boss. He added an appropriate level of menace to his performance.

**Paula Bland**, who has previously been involved creatively with the society, brought a good vocal to the unexpected side of the rapping nun *Sister Mary Lazarus*.

**Katie Passey** was a confident *Sister Mary Patrick* in a role she described in her bio as a ‘*dream come true*’ in her return to performing.

The roles of *Joey*, *Pablo* and *TJ*, the crime boss’ sidekicks, were played by **Mirza Malik**, **David Adams** and **Hannah Rourke** respectively. The trio worked effectively as a group showing they had obviously invested considerable rehearsal time together, most evident in their rendition of “Lady In The Long Black Dress”.

### **Ensemble**

The large ensemble of sisters all pulled together impressively to support the main players for the duration but especially in the chase sequence. Doubling as transients was easy to achieve while other minor roles were handled adequately by members of the company.

### **Costumes**

Overseen by **Nic Corden**, the nun’s habits / tunics were plainly uniform across the board yet were strikingly upcycled with the simple addition of colour inserts released from below the necklines as required. My only note here would be that shorts should have been a requirement to avoid the glimpses of pairs of jeans and chinos underneath on occasion.

The Mother Superior’s tunic, scapular and wimple looked authentic while the latter colourful nun’s habits / tunics were eye catching and uplifting to match the musical numbers. As previously mentioned, the outfits for both *Eddie* and *Curtis* were well chosen while all other costumes, particularly those for *Deloris*, appeared appropriate for the period.

### **Sets & Props**

The performance area had been preset with a main hung backdrop and wings replicating a series of stain glass windows. They were very colourful when lit. Several trucks were utilised to represent the various scenes required and worked well knowing the lack of backstage space to accommodate them.

Items of props were facilitated by **Leslie Clay** and **Helen Wikeley** and complimented the overall effect.

### **Stage Management**

**Mark Fitzgerald** led a competent crew who effectively manoeuvred the various trucks and furniture required to populate the performance area. A good effort from all involved behind the scenes.

### **Lighting & Sound**

The lighting design by **John Castle** and sound design by **Jacob Holmes** worked in tandem to add to the production.

### **Orchestra**

The nine, no doubt, specifically chosen members of the orchestra included a bass, drums / percussion, a guitar, a piano / keyboard, 2 x reed, a trombone and 2 x trumpets. They provided an excellent rendition of the score which had a balanced sound level and at no point overpowered any of the vocals.

### **Musical Director**

With **Mark Newport**, the company’s resident MD at the helm, I immediately knew that this production was going to be musically memorable. Under his baton, the orchestra were steered at a steady pace through this Alan Menken / Glenn Slater score while the ensemble provided well prepared and rehearsed harmonies with good projection and diction.

### **Choreographer**

**Emma Bell** devised uncomplicated yet effective routines for the main musical numbers which were well within the abilities of the ensemble. They had been well rehearsed and were executed with precision. Other numbers were imaginative and handled well by the individuals involved.

### **Director**

**Matt Fowler** led a competent group of creatives and cast a cross section of individuals for this production. His main players, of many ages and with varying levels of experience, produced a thoroughly uplifting version of the show under his experienced direction which was well received. A job well done.

**NODA Website Production Summary**

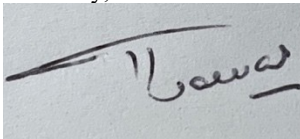
*Mother Superior* had great stage presence and looked both comfortable and believable in her role. The large ensemble of sisters all pulled together impressively to support the main players for the duration but especially in the chase sequence. Musical numbers had been well rehearsed and were executed with precision.

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My heartfelt thanks to Mark and his committee for the invitation to the production. It is always a pleasure to visit and network with your membership at your productions.

I look forward to seeing you all again at your next production, Cole Porter's **ANYTHING GOES**.

Sincerely,



**THOMAS LENNON**

NODA London District 7 Regional Representative

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:**

**NODA London AGM & Celebration Day 2025**

Sunday 22 June 2025 *(full details to follow in due course)*

**NODA Theatre Summer School 2025**

Saturday 26 July 2025 to Saturday 02 August 2025 *(full details to follow in due course)*

**NODA AGM & Presidential Gala 2025**

Saturday 27 September 2025 *(full details to follow in due course)*