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| **Society** | **:** | **ELODS** |
| **Production** | **:** | **Guys and Dolls** |
| **Date** | **:** | **16th October 2026** |
| **Venue** | **:** | **Wyllyotts Theatre, Potters Bar** |
| **District** | **:** | **District 7** |

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**Show Report**

Like so many of the cast and production team mentioned in the programme, Guys and Dolls is one of my favourite musicals and I'm always delighted to see it again. This is maybe the 10th production I've seen or been in and the opening bars of the Overture brought back the thrill of this classic immediately.

Damion Runyon's Broadway short stories are a joy to read and see recreated on stage through Guys and Dolls. Runyonesque has become a term for certain character types with specific dialogue, accent and colour. The names he provided makes for a cartoon flavour and the subtitle, A Musical Fable of New York, underlines this genre. So, the show should not be played too seriously, the characters too realistic and the delivery of lines should be obviously of Runyon's New York.

In the main, this production hit all those goals and decorated this story with great singing, movement and dance with a stage full of talented performers.

**Set**

The set was largely static and catered for all scenes. The large playing area in front of the street wall gave space for movement and a large cast of thirty-one. The raised walkway added variety for entrances and perhaps could have been used more. The passerelle around the orchestra was a terrific idea that I suspect was not easy to build and make safe. It was used well and confidently enabling scene changes behind the closed curtains whilst the action continued.

The movement of furniture, such as the newsstand and Mission, were swiftly set and struck by cast and crew. This had been carefully choreographed and executed efficiently. Well done to Mark Fitzgerald, Rosie Cennamo and anyone back stage.

**Direction**

Guys and Dolls is a complex show to stage but Scott Welch did a good job as Director. Runyonland introduced the Broadway characters each depicting an element of life on the streets. We saw the thief and policeman, the tour guide and tourists, the show dolls and guys all filling the stage and creating this make -believe world. Moving the phone call to Joey to offstage left whilst the Hot Box was set was a good idea. I liked the small cameos seen during the Guys and Dolls song, the Salvation Army marching across the floor without Sarah, the ending of act one with Sarah's exit, spotlights on Sky posed with his head down and then blackout.

The pace of delivery built over time but was not too fast to blur the understanding of the story. The dice rolling was rather laboured and could have moved faster as nothing really happened apart from Nathan lost some money.

I think the accents could have been pushed more into the Runyonesque burr. That broad nasal New York was evident in some, particularly Adelaide, but at times the Gamblers sounded like a bunch of Hertfordshire men putting on American accents. The lines are written in a distinctive vernacular way which mixes formality with slang, often in the present tense. At times we lost some this idiosyncratic style which meant many of the comic gag lines didn't resonate. They got titters from the audience but not laugh out loud moments.

My overall impression was that dramatically this was a safe interpretation, not taking too many risks. The dancing was flamboyant and feisty but the characters were controlled and contained. Apart from Adelaide and Sarah I think there was room to exaggerate the cartoon nature of Runyon's creations making them more bold and daring.

**Choreography**
Maria Kleanthous brought style, energy and fun to the dances. Her synchronised routines were excellent and she worked the talented Hot Box girls well.

The Havana scene had a great routine of vibrant samba dance some of it in couples, some in synchronised steps, some in rapid arrangements and moves around the stage. It was a great watch with so much happening at once. The breaks for Sarah and Sky's dialogue worked well and the fireman's lift of Sarah by Sky appeared effortless.

A Bushel and a Peck and Take Back Your Mink were standalone routines for the Hot Box Girls and all showcased the talents of these fine dancers. The unclothing in Take Back Your Mink was fast and fun. The Crapshooters' Dance was a full-on routine filling every bit of the stage with energy and precision. This led into the terrific Luck Be a Lady which was slick with so many good moves.

The audience looks forward with anticipation to see how Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat would be staged and this audience wasn't disappointed judging by the resultant cheers. The iconic pews, sways, ups and downs were all in place and accomplished with style. A great company number that would have taken an encore.

**Music**
It was a pleasure to hear the Band showcased with the Overture which introduced so many of the well-known themes. The blend of reed and brass instruments gave that iconic sound which triumphed in Fugue for Tinhorns and ascended in so many of the numbers. We really enjoyed the quality of the musicians and congratulations on making an uplifting sound of blues, jazz and show tunes.

The band was in the expert hands of MD Mark Newport who knows how to get the best out of singers and musicians alike. All the principals sang well under Mark's direction ensuring the phrasing, timing and quality was first class. The cast sounded good, coping well with the complexity of such numbers as Fugue for Tinhorns, Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat, Marry the Man Today and Luck Be a Lady. This is not an easy score and takes practice to build the performers' confidence with timings, intonation and phrasing. This was a great sounding show, well done.

**Cast**
It's probably true that the success of any Guys and Dolls production relies heavily on the abilities of the four main principals. Casting of these parts is crucial as each needs to be able to hold the story, develop the characters and sing those magical songs. ELODS did a great job with this casting as all four gave high quality performances and enabled the show to be a success.

**Sky Masterson**
Sky is one of those iconic musical male leads that must be part of every leading man's musical theatre canon. With Marlon Brando on film and Ian Charleston and Ewan McGregor on stage Sky is often played slick, smooth and statuesque whereas Greg Wedge made this Sky rather rougher and more rounded. It worked well in Greg's hands and made for a down to earth Sky rather than the more regular matinee idol.

Greg found the important magnetism of Masterson that enabled him to own the stage and drive his scenes onward. He fell for Nathan's trick and ended with an ear full of cider. His scenes with Sarah were excellent as the two obviously had the "chemistry" needed for the attraction. Sky pretended to be truthful in the first mission visit as he tried to quickly close the deal but after the kiss and the slap he vowed to "drop in again".

We saw the regret in Sky during the Havana scene as he knew taking Sarah was for all the wrong reasons. He was keen to get her back safely to New York. Once there he explained his love of the "smell of the rain-washed pavement" and the "gutter with gold" and how Sarah was "the only girl I've ever wanted to share it with me". Greg played these scenes very convincingly and we saw his dilemma of falling in love and for once being slightly scared.

Greg has a voice that is a joy to listen to and his renditions of I'll Know, My Time of Day and Luck Be A Lady were wonderful.

**Sarah Brown**
I've seen a lot of actors play Sarah, some well-known names, but I'm not sure I've seen such a fully rounded and expressive performance as the one given by Claudia Lynch. The contrast she achieved between Sergeant Sarah Brown, the party girl in Havana, and the troubled romantic, nervous of falling in love, was skillfully crafted.

She made her frustration clear at not being able to persuade the locals of the "Devil's own city" to come to the mission and follow a better path. Sarah's willingness to embrace Sky on their first meeting was a more comfortable approach than the traditional forcing of Sky upon Sarah, although the slap still felt justified and led to the great line about "taking a crack at the other cheek". Her dilemma in the mission when saying to Branigan, "I never saw them before", was clearly difficult.

I liked the move Sarah made whilst Sky was singing, I'll Know, walking behind and around him, watching and listening. Sarah's progression into drunk abandon with the Dulce de Leche was excellent and, in the end, didn't hold back. She was into those dances with her hair down and the man of her dreams for a night. We certainly got the other side of Sergeant Sarah and If I Were a Bell was tremendous. Back in New York, Sarah was sobering, embarrassed and then angry at appearing to have been hoodwinked. All these emotions were beautifully exhibited by Claudia and it was this that gave Sarah much more depth than in often seen.

Claudia has the most delightful singing voice that fitted this 1950's musical style. Perched on the desk for I'll Know, her voice soared, filling the theatre with wonderful tones. Claudia's was an excellent performance, well done.

**Miss Adelaide**
Full marks to Marian Lynch for giving us a Miss Adelaide that Runyon would have been proud of. Her portrayal ticked all the boxes and was just how I imagine Miss Adelaide should be. Blousy, opinionated and part of the local folklore, she just wanted to be married. Her cold provided the nasal twang of the NY accent superbly; Poisonally, Insecewuer, Pour thing. Her timing on the comedy lines was good "Makes me feel like we're married", "I've tried all the other rooms", "Have him phone me here".

Adelaide told the story of her mother and the five children really well, developing the story with comic effect. Likewise, the telling of Adelaide's Lament drew us into her frustration and sadness; I loved the closing of the book on each beat. When paired with Sarah for Marry The Man we heard the two contrasting styles of singing come together and blend well. These two unlikely friends found the resonance of their situations and told their stories with passion. I really liked this scene and watching these two consummate musical theatre performers was a highlight of the show.

Marian created a character full of personality, moved and danced in the right style and told the stories through song superbly. Well done.

**Nathan Detroit**
This part was played by Nic Corden and he helped make Nathan the central character. Although not a dominating presence, Nic did manage to draw the attention of the audience in most of his scenes.

The scenes between Nathan and Adelaide were excellent as Adelaide made her impassioned requests and Nathan made feeble excuses. This was showcased in their working together on Sue Me where they succeeded in showing their affection for each other. Nic landed most of the excellent comic lines without making this a totally comic character. "Psychology; You haven't got that have you" was good banter.

I would have liked Nic to have taken more risks in his portrayal. Nathan's dilemma around the crap game and his devotion to Adelaide pulled him emotionally and physically and I would have liked to have seen him squirm more under the pressure. In that lies the foundations for the comedy and the connection with the audience.

**Nicely – Nicely Johnson**
The always eating Nicely – Nicely was in the capable hands of John Stivey. His loveable Nicely was warm and welcoming and more of a helper than a hustler. His many animated gestures slid into panto on occasions and a stiller more controlled presence may have helped land the gag lines. His regular entrances and exits became a fun theme.

John's Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat was outstanding. It's the big number, full of audience expectation and requires an energetic sing. The charm this Nicely had banked before this scene made the story telling appealing and funny. It's a song most musical theatre actors would want to perform and they would be the first to applaud John's rendition.

**Benny Southstreet**
I really liked Roger Bunnage's portrayal of Benny**.** It was perfectly in the Runyon mode being slick in movement, always on the lookout and heavy on the accent. His movement in character was sharp and with the green toned clothes he fitted the cartoon style very well. Roger was excellent in the Fugue and Guys and Dolls and sang well with his partners in crime. He also added much to the dances and his overall contribution was significant. Good work, well done.

**Arvide Abernathy**
Richard Hutchinson played Sarah's loving grandfather Arvide, with geniality that made everyone warm to him. He was always supportive and wanting the best for what ever Sarah desired. The delightful lilting More I Cannot Wish you, with its Irish undertones was put across well, although it was a shame it wasn't set with Arvide seated as standing is more difficult to provide the intimacy that the song deserves. Despite all his gentleness, Arvide was street wise enough to know what welching on his marker meant to Sky's reputation.

**Big Jule**
The not so big Big Jule was a smart "Scout Master" from East Cicero just flown in for the game. Much of the comedy of this character is built upon the actor being a large person which made it hard for Mark Tobin. He did what he could with the lines and added the colour of this character to the Gamblers' scenes.

**The Hot Box Girls**
Congratulations to Maddie Stoughton, Lucy Beasley, Jess Hember, Shelley Kyriacou and Helen Wikeley as the collective Hot Box Girls. Maria must have been delighted to be able to work with such talented dancers that made the complex fast moves look easy and thrilled the audiences with their show girl boldness. A Bushel and a Peck was great and Take Back Your Mink even better. I liked when they girls joined the scenes as themselves with little shimmies and finger flapping waves to the nightclub punters. Mimi played her part with charm and Lucy often led from the front. Great work.

**Lieutenant Brannigan**
John Hillier played Lieutenant Brannigan as a rather tired cop who after all these years was still being given the run around by these "bums". I got the impression retirement wasn't far away and couldn't come fast enough. He regular returned to catch the "Holly Rollers" only to be outsmarted. What a job!

**General Matilda Cartwright**
The sunny natured General Cartwright had to bring the bad news of the mission closure to this Broadway team. Claire Svoboda brought warm regret to this announcement rather than anything heartless. She was happy to be convinced that Sky could give the Mission "a chance" and to feature in the dancing for Rocking the Boat. In the end the General was delighted that the mission was doing so well and we could tell she wasn't too bothered how it was brought about. Good cameo, well done.

**The Ensemble**
Everyone played a significant role in this production with plenty to do and contribute. The harmony singing in The Oldest Established and Rocking the Boat was excellent and those raw chords shone through. Everyone moved around the busy stage well making an exciting and colourful production.

**Costumes**
I understand that apart for the Sally Army uniforms, the costumes were provided by the company. Certainly, the wardrobe team, led by Sophie Shoults came up trumps with the fantastic array of 1950s costumes. The matching Hot Box Girls show outfits were sensational, the suits, spats and trilbies periodly pleasing and the swishing dresses in New York and Havana, typically tropical. Thank you for the attention to detail and the huge task undertaken.

**And Finally….**
It was obvious everyone on stage had a great time creating and performing this classic musical. That seeped out into the sell-out audience and made for a memorable evening's entertainment. Congratulations to everyone involved.

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