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CODS

Guys and Dolls

Queen's Hall Theatre, Cranbrook

Director: Annie Hatcher

MD: John Williams

Choreographer: Hannah Carter & Dance Captain Sarah Hutchings

Thursday 25th October 2018

First performed professionally in 1950 this is a well-tested Broadway storyline of Damon Runyon characters creating a musical romantic comedy with memorable numbers written by Frank Loesser. These include 'I've Never Been in Love Before', 'I'll Know When My Love Comes Along', 'Adelaide's Lament', 'Luck be a Lady', 'Sit Down you're Rocking the Boat' and 'More I Cannot Wish You' being some. A big NY gambler Sky Masterson and Save -a-Soul Mission Sergeant Miss Sarah Brown looking for more sinners to convert, seem an unlikely pairing as the leads. Nathan Detroit is looking to run a crap game but needs \$1000 and where to get it from? Hot Box dancer Miss Adelaide takes the comedic role and is frustrated with 'full of promises' Nathan after 14 years engagement. All the time Lt. Brannigan is on the trail of the gamblers, who finally all repent their sins and the couples happily unite.

Easy to handle and read, the standard A5 informative programme was again designed by Lee Hatcher, with the exceptional photographic display of past shows and a large collection from the current show, nicely set up in the foyer, arranged by Lisa Hills and Guy Fillmore - always of interest. It was good to see that on this Thursday the performance was being 'signed' adeptly, which I found to be most interesting.

Director Annie Hatcher also designed the set. The five-man construction team created an open stage set with angled side wings depicting the street wall complete with flyers and telephone booth one side, and the Mission showing coloured glass windows and a central door used for both exterior and interior scenes. Downstage was a walled archway containing the sewer entrance with a circular hatch on stage. The steam effect from the sewer was most atmospheric and well used by the athletic actors. Changes of scenes were done by various moveable clothes and decorations - a clever idea but somewhat slowing up action and leaving the hardworking stage crew rather too visible. However, this was opening night and I'm sure pace will speed up. Steps down to the front of the auditorium were well used, as was front of stage. The lively band led ably by John Williams were placed at the back of the stage - sometimes seen and others with a white backdrop used for projections drawn across. Perhaps distracting but perfect for the Havana scene. This left a limited stage area which was well managed by the performers and dancers alike. The illuminated Hot Box sign looked stunning.

Penny Tobin set up and provided good realistic sound effects, radio mikes, with volume and balance just right. James Harper and Elly Hills oversaw the adequate lighting.

Singing was well rehearsed and beautifully coherent. The men did a grand job with 'Luck Be a Lady' - full company numbers most enthusiastic. The Mission Girls may have benefitted

from a few more singers to encourage the volume. Excellent duet/trio renditions came from Nicely- Nicely, Benny and Rusty, with good accents throughout, portrayed by Robin Harrison, Glyn Roberts and Max Chesters. Duncan Fryer characterised well Nathan Detroit – his first appearance with CODS pairing with Louise Franklin as his long suffering, perfectly costumed Miss Adelaide, sounding well matched, with some classic comedy lines that were beautifully timed. Monika Green played a delightful Sarah, quite a contrast from last seeing her perform Delores, with top quality singing, who worked very well with tenor Simon Tomlinson the worldly yet vulnerable Sky, particularly enjoying their ‘I’ve Never Been in Love Before’ and most amusing was their ‘If I were a Bell’ Havana night. Keith Hedley performed a perfectly cast Arvide Abernathy, master of the big drum, singing a touching rendition of ‘More I Cannot Wish You’ to Sarah and this was a highlight moment for me.

Rita Wilkins and Sharon Pickles dressed the whole show rather well for the 50’s era, both colourful and fun, Hot Box girls looked appropriately naughty, all-well shoed with good accessories too. Ladies’ hair was well groomed and suitably styled, with make-up also of the time – good red lips under the supervision of Penny Tobin’s expertise. The numerous props required, including instruments, were well provided by Lee Hatcher wearing yet another hat!

As usual an army of hardworking helpers were involved with this production, headed by direction of Annie Hatcher, with the company and dance movements arranged by Hannah Carter assisted by Dance Captain Sarah Hutchings.

Thankyou CODS and I’m also pleased to say I won one of your raffle prizes!

A precis will appear on the NODA website very shortly.

Anne Lawson
Regional Representative
NODA SE
District 3

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

15 The Metro Centre, Peterborough PE2 7UH

Tel 01733 374790 **Fax** 01733 237 286 **Email** info@noda.org.uk **Web** www.noda.org.uk

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