



Society : Maidenhead Operatic Society
Production : **HOW TO SUCCEED TO BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING**
Date : Saturday 22nd November 2014
Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

I was delighted to be invited to see the Frank Loesser's musical *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. The book is by Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock and Willie Gilbert and the musical is based on Shepherd Mead's 1952 book.

The story follows of an ambitious young man, J. Pierrepont Finch, who decides that he can do better than being a window cleaner all his life and so rises to role of board chairman with aid of his book, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

The original musical opened on Broadway in October 1961 and ran for some 1,417 performances, winning seven Tony Awards and the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

It is not a show that I have seen before, although I have heard a lot about it, so welcomed the opportunity of watching it for the first time.

Whilst researching for this show, I noticed that it had recently been revived by on Broadway in for its 50th anniversary in 2011 and featured Daniel Radcliffe in the leading role.

Maidenhead Operatic Society produced a very well rehearsed show, displaying an excellent vocal understanding, good movement and perfect casting.

J. Pierrepont Finch (RYAN STEVENS)

I have seen Ryan several times over the years and this was one of his best performances as the former window cleaner who scales the heights in *Worldwide Wicket Company*. His singing was first class, movement and dancing assured and his interpretation of the character was very well defined and consistent throughout. The on stage chemistry with Rosemary was first class. An excellent performance.

Rosemary (LUCY MARSHALL)

The role of the secretary of WWC who falls in love with Finch was admirably performed by Lucy. She portrayed a down to earth and sweet character very well. I loved the opening introduction with Finch that set up the relationship. I also enjoyed the wonderful reaction to his proposal. Her singing was a joy to listen to. A lovely performance, well done.

J B Biggley (BRENT WHITTED)

This was a lovely portrayal by Brent as the boss of the company who is having an affair with one of the secretaries. There was plenty of comic opportunity and Brent did not disappoint. I liked the moment when he produces the knitting out of the cabinet and puts his feet up! The performance was aided by

some good facial expressions. He displayed a good singing voice and I particularly enjoyed his duet with Hedy (*Love from A Heart of Gold*). Excellent characterisation.

Smitty (DONNA MACFADYEN)

Donna produces some good comic delivery as the part of Smitty, Rosemary's best friend and fellow secretary at the Worldwide Wicket Company. Donna sung very well and I enjoyed *Been A Long Day* and *Cinderella, Darling*.

Bud Frump (BAXTER BULLOCK)

This was a good interpretation by Baxter as Biggley's arrogant and lazy nephew. I liked the way Baxter played this character, more of a geeky and not so lazy as often performed. To my mind this worked very well indeed. There was good chemistry with the others on stage.

Hedy LaRue (SALLY SHARP)

This was a wonderful performance by Sally as Biggley's attractive and dim-witted mistress. From her first entrance through the lift she set produced a sparkling characterisation. *Love From A Heart of Gold* was wonderfully sung.

Bert Bratt (NATHAN AUERBACH)

This is a nice part to play as it has some lovely moments. Nathan has a wonderfully strong singing voice that was used to good effect and his characterisation as the firm's personnel manager was first class.

Mr Twimble (DAREN BRANDON)

I thought this part was very well cast, so well done Daren for a lovely performance of the head of the mailroom. Wonderful reaction when he got his promotion after 25 years. Well cast and well sung.

Miss Jones (LIZ COUPER-JOHNSTON)

A wonderful character part! Biggley's stern secretary was superbly played by Liz, showing wonderful characterisation! There were good reactions to Finch, contrasting very well with the others on stage.

Wally Womper & The Voice of the Book (JAMES COUPER-JOHNSTON)

Two nice parts to play – with the "voice" of the book was very well read by James. As Mr. Wally Womper, the Chairman of WWC, he displayed the gravitas the character required. His accent and intonation were excellent.

Miss Krumholtz (JAMI CASTELL)

Jami portrayed a good sustained character of firstly Mr. Gatch's secretary and then Finch's. She sung well and presented a pleasant character complimenting the other secretaries.

Milt Gatch (SCOTT KITSON)

I thought Scott played the role of the head of the department for Plans and Systems very well indeed, showing good vocal delivery.

Benjamin Burton Daniel Ovington (CHRIS BAISTER)

This was a good performance by Chris as the prospective head of the advertising department.

Chorus

The chorus performed the variety of songs very well and were clearly well rehearsed. Although some did have clearly defined characters that were very well portrayed, some did not and disappeared into the background slightly. It is difficult to develop a character in chorus but with a little more confidence it does make for a better production. This is just a small point, as the majority of the chorus DID have a character (or characters when they were playing different roles). The singing, movement and dancing was very well presented by everyone. Entrances and exits were very well observed and at a good pace.

Director (LOU TAIT)

This was a very slick production with good entrances and exits and very well defined characters. Movement around the stage was well thought out although I did wonder why the on stage costume change for Finch could not have been DSL out of the way? I loved the nice comic moment when all the women turn up with same dresses and also the nice distancing of the men to move away from nephew at the end. Overall this was a well thought through production with good casting and fine performances.

Music Director (SEANN WILKINSON)

The high standard of singing of MOS was once again in evidence throughout this production. All the soloists were very well rehearsed for their roles and the chorus numbers were equally prepared. The song *Been a Long Day* in particular was wonderfully sung. Congratulations Seann on a very good show. The vocal balance was very strong by this cast and not for the first time it was a pleasure to hear such finely balanced performers.

Choreographer (TILLY MITCHELL)

There were some lovely unusual choreographed movements for this show. I enjoyed Chorus number *Coffee Break*. The typewriter desks on wheel created an imaginative choreography routine for the company – with zombie like movements. *A Secretary Is Not A Toy* showed good quirky movements and *Groundhog* was nicely set with some good reactions shown by Finch. The football sequence was very well performed and understandably (and deservedly) there were good audience reactions to the overhead flip! I think it is important to keep the momentum going after the break and I was pleased to see a good energetic opening number for act two by secretaries (*Cinderella Darling*). The choreographed moves for the washroom sequence fitted well for that scene and I loved the funny quirky choreography in *Brotherhood of Men*. Overall, Tilly produced a good, consistent and entertaining standard of dances appropriate for this group. Well done

Stage Manager (ALICIA WALKER)

Once again this was a very well run stage with no obvious gaps, pauses – with good quick scene changes and a very well drilled back stage crew. I did wonder if the back stage crew could have been in brown/blue overalls with company logo as if they were office maintenance employees?

Set

This was a good set, with the filing cabinet, desk and leather chair down stage right situated in front of the tabs. The opening scene blacks were in with blocks with window frame which worked perfectly well. The cyclorama displayed black buildings with painted flats in front with office doors and an elevator. Unfortunately I did not realise it was an elevator to begin with so probably needed some additional cosmetic setting – perhaps some numbers above the door to indicate the floor levels? To my mind the mailroom set could have benefited with some pigeon holes for letters but I can understand as it was not essential to the plot. Overall the set was very well defined, constructed and allowed sufficient space for the performance.

LX Design (ANDY NICHOLSON)

The range of colours used for the songs enhanced the production. I have witnessed Andy's work before and I am always impressed how he manages to find the right mode for the songs. Well done.

Technicians (ANNE HEWITT, JOE CALLERAN)

All of the cues were delivered on time so well done to you both. I noted the good use of the follow spot.

Sound (MATT SMITH)

Overall the sound effects were good, delivered on cue at a good, appropriate level. The book, for example, was presented very well. I did wonder if there could have been a sound effect of a "ting" for the arrival of the elevator?

Properties (JON MORRIS, DELIA NICHOLSON)

I am always amazed how people are able to find the appropriate items for shows – and particularly when they are period shows. I must congratulate Jon and Delia for their efforts as all the props seemed relevant to the period and place. I loved Finch's knitting (complete with the holes) and typewriters looked of the period.

Costumes (JENNY HARRIS)

All of the costumes looked appropriate to the period and location. I liked the fact all the women turned up at the party in the same dress (which must have caused quite a few problems to source, make, amend etc) but the overall effect was worth it. All of the costumes looked like they fitted and seemed very well pressed and presentable.

Front of House

Once again the busy front of house team and the charming Alf Bramley was able to find time to greet myself and my wife. The team always make us feel welcome so many thanks to all of the hard working team. It was lovely to see everyone dressed up – a tradition that some societies have seem to have phased out in recent years.

Programme

The sixteen paged, predominately black and white programme, contained all the relevant and useful information. There were some good, interesting biographies and clear black and white portrait photographs. I am pleased the rehearsal photographs were also clear (as sometimes these are so

(5)

small you cannot really see the detail!). A list of musical numbers and scenes helped me on the night and also as a good aide memoire! Thank you for a mention of NODA.

I did not know too much about this show, although it had been made popular since Daniel Radcliffe (he of Harry Potter fame) recently starred in a revival. However, this did not ruin my enjoyment of this fine production by some excellent singing and enhanced by some good choreographed movement and a very well cast set of principal parts. Thank you once again for a thoroughly enjoyable evening and I look forward to your next production, Rodgers and Hammerstein's Carousel in May.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Bird'.

Gordon Bird
NODA representative
London Region, District 14

