



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Reading Operatic Society
Production : Annie
Date : Friday 28th September 2018
Venue : Kenton Theatre - Henley
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

For a society starting a regeneration process; I feel they have made an excellent start. Choosing a show that is a sure fire audience pleaser is definitely the way to go; and the audience on the evening of my visit certainly enjoyed every minute.

Annie is one of those feel good musicals that has everything; great characters, witty yet poignant dialogue, humour and memorable tuneful songs. The show had been well cast and there were some super performances from principals' chorus and children

Andrew Johnson – (David Bennett)

Natasha Maxworthy – (Margaret Bennett) – These two had been given a little cameo; leaving Annie at the door of the orphanage. They acted this with a subtle poignancy and set the scene for the rest of the show.

Ella Newborough – (Annie) – This young lady was an absolute breath of fresh air. Her acting was first rate with energetic dynamic dialogue, animated facial expressions and peppy vital movement. I enjoyed the magic in the relationship between her and Warbucks, and delighted in the way she played off Miss Hannigan. It was refreshing to find a young actress that does not belt every musical number. She has a lovely singing voice and put her numbers over in character with feeling and emotion. Well Done!

Sophie Farmer – (Molly) - As the youngest orphan this lass gave a splendid performance. Her dialogue was clear audible and expressive whilst maintaining a good accent throughout. She had a great singing voice and made the most of her solo lines

Faith Wood-Blagrove – (Pepper) - What a fiery and excitable character this young lady created! Her dialogue movement and singing were all of the highest order and she absolutely exuded charisma.

Sienna Eden – (Duffy) - This young lady was excellent! Although I would have liked a little more projection she delivered her dialogue with pizzazz and her visuals were nicely animated

Sophia Newborough – (July)

Katie Mulligan - (Tessie)

Florence Wood-Blagrove – (Kate) – This trio completed the group of orphans and together they were absolutely fantastic! They sparkled throughout giving exuberant performances which had real attitude. Their singing and movement were excellent and “Hard Knock Life” and “Never Fully Dressed” were superb.

Anna McCormack – (Miss Agatha Hannigan) – I so enjoyed every minute of this actress' performance; she had the character off to an absolute T. Her reaction and interaction was superb and the rapport she created with Annie perfect. Her dialogue delivery and timing

was sublime and the intonation and inflection she achieved superlative. Her movement was fluid and easy and this really came to the fore in “Easy Street” which was the highlight of the evening. Her rendition of “Little Girls” was sung with vigour passion and immense feeling.

Ryan Stevens – (Mr Bundles) – This actor really made the most of his little scene with Miss Hannigan bringing the humour out brilliantly. His dialogue was well delivered with good accent diction and projection

Andrew Johnson – (Apple Seller)

Chris Reddington – (Dog Catcher)

Natasha Maxworthy – (Assistant Dog Catcher)

Ray Higgs – (Lt Ward)

Nicky Jagger – (Sophie) – These minor characters really brought their scene to life. There was some excellent dialogue great movement and super interaction

Laura Newborough – (Grace Farrell) – This actress delivered a sophisticated performance of the highest quality. Her dialogue had a wonderfully rhythmic lilt and her character warm affectionate and liberal. She has a superlative singing voice and brought all the number she was involved in to life; especially “I Think I’m Gonna Like it Here” and “You Won’t be an Orphan for Long”

Colin Webb – (Drake) - As Warbucks butler this actor gave a super performance. His dialogue was crisp clean and well projected he also had a really great singing voice and his solo pieces came over famously

Gemma Didcock – (Mrs Greer)

Samantha Prior – (Mrs Pugh) – This pair provided us with lively characterisations with good dialogue and excellent singing.

Jennie Dick – (Cecile)

Delun Jones – (Annette) – These two completed the Warbucks’ household and made the characters their own. They moved superbly well and supported the rest of the cast with thought and energy

Rob Wilson – (Oliver Warbucks) – This actor was truly outstanding his characterisation was brusque and dominant softening under the avid gaze of Annie. The relationship he forged with Annie was quite delectable and the heartache and anguish he felt when he thought he had lost her was intensely palpable. He has a superb singing voice and all his numbers were first rate but none more so than “Something was Missing” which was meritorious.

Nicky Jagger – (Star to Be) – Sometimes this small cameo can get lost in the melee of the NYC scene. However not on this occasion! She absolutely shone with great vocals and an incredible tap routine!

Ryan Stevens – (Daniel ‘Rooster’ Hannigan) – This was a standout performance! He was flashy and self-assured whilst bringing a great deal of fun to the character. His dialogue was animatedly energetic and his facial expressions were vivid and cocksure. His movement was outstanding being smooth casual and easy; throughout “Easy Street” my eye was drawn to him constantly which made me smile because I enjoyed his performance so much!

Nicola Morrin – (Lily St. Regis) – As Rooster’s dizzy blonde girlfriend this young lady had perfected a sassy flippant character. Her dialogue was well delivered with great inflection and her movement complimented her brash persona. I liked the way she changed her stature and voice to accommodate Shirley Mudge. Her part in “Easy Street” was well sung and she really came to life throughout the routine.

Chris Reddington – (Bert Healey) – This was a nicely depicted character with just the right amount of “cheese”. Dialogue was well delivered and “Never Fully Dressed” sung with flair

Andrew Johnson – (Jimmy Johnson)

Johanna Tooze – (Freida McCracken) – These two performed their roles brilliantly with exactly the right flavour for their character and made the whole scene humorously entertaining.

Delun Jones – (Bonnie Boylan)

Katie Smith – (Connie Boylan)

Jessica Wilkins – (Ronnie Boylan) – This trio was delightful; looking disinterested reading magazines and chewing gum! They looked great in their matching costumes and blonde wigs. Their voices really complemented one another; and they had good harmonies.

Ray Higgs – (President Roosevelt) – This was a well delineated characterisation; congenial approachable and optimistic. Dialogue was well delivered with excellent accent diction intonation and projection. He sang well and led a super rendition of “Tomorrow”

Gareth Watkins – (Howe)

Colin Webb- (Ickes)

Chris Reddington – (Hull)

Andrew Johnson – (Morganthau)

Angie Garland – (Perkins) – As Roosevelt’s cabinet this group was excellent. They worked well together and their dialogue had pace and energy. Their singing was first rate and the blend of voices harmonious and delightfully tuneful.

Gareth Watkins – (Judge Brandeis) – Although this actor had very little to do he played his part with a refined demeanour punctuated with good movement.

Sandy – (Gabriel) – C/o **Stacey Stockwell** and handled by **Katie Costello** I could not leave out Gabriel who acquitted herself admirably!

Nick Brannam – (Director/Choreographer) – As director Nick excelled in his direction for this show. He had obviously inspired the cast and had given them clear definition on their characterisations dialogue and overall persona. Staging was cleverly worked with excellent blocking and groupings. Even when space was confined he had managed to ensure all actors could be seen with no upstaging; all of which culminated in creating a fast paced captivating and engaging piece of theatre. There were some lovely little touches throughout; I particularly liked the way he had used the children to listen outside the office when Grace was choosing Annie and also the way he had Miss Hannigan leave the stage on her hands and knees My only criticism would be the very beginning when Annie was reading her letter to Molly. The other girls dialogue was overpowering and it all became a jumble and we were not able to ascertain exactly what the letter did say. However that said

accolade the joyfulness and enchantment that exuded from the stage to the audience was just wondrous!

I so enjoyed all the routines Nick had created as choreographer. He was not afraid to give the orphans real gritty movement that oozed attitude and was totally perfect for “Hard Knock Life”. “Hooverville” on the other hand was hard hitting making use of static positioning and patterns but delivering a real a punch. However the highlight of the evening for me was “Easy Street” this was fresh brash and dynamic with some superb period movement.

Josh Robinson – (Musical Director) – Josh really brought out the very best in this cast.. Whether it was principals or chorus they all had exceptional diction precise timing and secure entrances. The dynamics of the vocals was quite exquisite ensuring the lyrics were as important as the tune. He wielded his baton with a sympathetic ear keeping the orchestra to a fine accompaniment whilst the performers were singing and giving it his all when they had a free hand.

David Parsonson – (Production Manager) – When I see this name I know the production will be first rate with every aspect coming together famously. I was not disappointed; once again David did a fantastic job and produced a production of the highest quality

Carol Hodgkinson – (Stage Manager) – **James Cook/Chris Dinsey** – (ASMs) & crew **Martyn Brown/Rhiannon Rowlands** This SM ran a tight ship and kept his crew working tirelessly in order to effect the changes quickly and efficiently. They did this brilliantly which kept the action moving with no dip in the pace.

Terry Hodgkinson – (Head Flyman) – With so many backdrops it was vital to have an experienced crew member in the flies; and this chap fulfilled his duties admirably.

Michael Brenkley – (Lighting Design) – I really liked the imaginative plot created by this technician. There was drear atmospheric lighting in Hooverville bleak dingy lighting in the orphanage and warm overall stage lighting in Warbucks. There were occasions when I felt the stage was in darkness a little too long as in the opening however this is a minor point. I particularly liked the lighting for “Easy Street”

Lucas Warner – (Follow Spot) – Having been spot operator for Annie myself I recognise how important a job this is. This technician did a great job and had Annie covered perfectly. It was also an asset during “Easy Street”.

Louis Martin – (Sound Design/Operation) – For the most part sound was adequate with only a slight hiccup with a personal mic whilst Annie was delivering her solo “Tomorrow”. Other than that mic’s were cued perfectly.

Rhi O’Keefe – (Sound 2) – The sound effects were all right for their use and had been well cued. However there were times when I felt the sound level was a little too intrusive; for instance the police sirens rather hurt the ears and Bert Healey’s radio broadcast overpowered the children to the extent that I did not hear a word they said.

Nick Brannam – (Scenic Design) – The set was well designed creating a realistic representation for the scene. Back drops by **Scenic Projects Ltd** were perfect for the scenes they were designed for and looked fresh and bright. The only disappointment for me was NYC it just didn’t have the glitz and pizzazz I would have expected.

Ryan Stevens – (Projection Design) – The projections added to the performance providing the audience with a direct link to the scenes. The operator cued these perfectly

Maddy Blake – (Properties) – These had been well collated authentic and of the era. I so liked the immaculately dressed Christmas tree Roosevelt's wheel chair the Mona Lisa painting and telephones. Other more mundane props; cases chairs tables filing cabinets and desks looked right and suited their purpose.

Pam Dennis – (Hair/Makeup) – with wigs provided by **Becky Rungen** the orphan's makeup was suitably dirty and unkempt and the rest of the cast had well defined features with good eye and lip colouring. Hair was of the period and wigs had been well fitted and looked quite natural. The only thing I would say was Annie's curly wig appeared to be too big for her face and it made her appear uncomfortable and ill at ease.

Judith Ifould – (Costumes Co-ordinator) – supplied by **Basingstoke Amateur Theatrical Society/Starmaker Theatre Company** Although I found some of the ladies costumes rather questionable for the period this did not detract from the overall look of the piece. The men's costumes on the other hand were spot on. The maids butler overall and police uniform were all authentic to the era and enhanced the production no end. I am always surprised to find that the orphans sleep in their clothes! I'm sure vest tops and bloomers would have been more suitable apparel and given a more authentic feel.

Programme – designed by **Ryan Stevens** This society never skimps on their programme and this was no exception. It was of good quality with a nice sized legible font and a cover that clearly depicted the show. Cast photos by **Brian Burden** had a good background which created sharp clear images.

Thank you

Jet

Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13