

DAVID BEACH Competition

Adjudication by Jadi Carlyon - Somerset Fellowship of Drama

As a local resident for many years, I have been fortunate to have been able to see many productions by this established society which has a long history of bringing both well-loved and modern musicals to local audiences. On arrival at the comfortable Strode Theatre for this fourth of six performances, my guest and I were warmly welcomed by the theatre staff and volunteers. Thank you for your kind hospitality. It is a tribute to your many past successes that you attract a wide audience and the auditorium was soon full of excited theatre-goers. Any criticisms or suggestions made in this adjudication are those of just one member of that audience who saw one performance. The smiles on the faces of the departing throng are what are most important. With all necessary paperwork quickly to hand, I had time to glance at the colourful programme which included some lovely photos of your rehearsals as well as the expected synopsis and cast profiles. Thank you for including the Fellowship of Drama logo. The show started at 7.32 and finished at 10.18 with a refreshment interval.

Direction – Paul Townsend

For a Society which has brought many musicals to the Street audience for the first time, it is a different challenge to revisit one of the classics of the genre with fresh eyes. After performing in Guys and Dolls with G&SMCS yourself 33 years ago, I guess you have had plenty of time to mull over directorial plans! In the attention span of a modern audience, this is a long show, so it is vital both to capture and to retain interest. Your opening, with all the colourful Runyonland characters, miming to the upbeat score was delightful, there was so much to catch and hold the eye from each little cameo performance. Nicely-Nicely then set off the singing at a brisk pace and the Fugue for Tinhorns, not an easy piece to perform, had power and accuracy from all 3 participants. There was visual variety within the show, use of tableau "I name her... cider" and some delightful comedy touches such as the see-saw comedy within the Mission as Big Jule sat down, simple but very effective. I also liked the constant association of Nicely-Nicely with a food item, the Eskimo kisses between Nathan and Adelaide and the comedy aspect of the Joey/Nathan 'phone call. However I was not quite sure about Adelaide being carried off, rather than escorted, by Nathan's henchmen. Accents varied, some, like Adelaide, Benny and Nicely-Nicely, were credible and well-sustained; others struggled with this aspect, notably Nathan and Lieutenant Brannigan. There were a couple of moments during non-singing sections of the first Act when energy seemed to flag but pace picked up again and Act 2 was clearly enjoyed by all participants with lovely contrasts such as the silent wedding preparations after the strong delivery of 'Marry the Man Today' by Sarah and Adelaide.

Musical Direction- Kathryn Stevens

The experienced musicians within the pit orchestra, with its enhanced wind section, produced a very supportive sound from the outset. I liked the light and shade shown when representing the Mission Band, appropriate foreground or background as required. Whilst confident actor/musicians are rare in amateur theatre, it would have been lovely if at least the percussion instruments could have been played by the onstage mission band, but I appreciate that this would have required additional rehearsal time which perhaps was not available. Your Principals and chorus groupings all sang with confidence and enthusiasm, whether in harmony or deliberate disharmony, evidence of good coaching and much practice. The duet pairings, Nicely/Benny, Sky/Sarah and Sarah/Adelaide all worked well together.

Choreography – Claire and Hannah Switzer

Although the hired sets gave very limited opportunity for variation in height above stage level, the use of choreography (such as the collision between the drunk and the parcel carrier and the spillage of trade goods in Runyonland) provided visual contrast. I was particularly impressed by the

dance choreography for your males. The opening number by the crapshooter chorus to 'The Oldest Established' with its marching/shoe cleaning routine combined with great vocal harmonies and the later delivery of 'Luck be a Lady' were both stylish and perfectly choreographed for this group. Movement by Nathan and Benny in 'Guys and Dolls' was also well-considered to enhance the duet. The Hot Box girls delivered a fine dance performance, not perfectly synchronised as befitted performers at a second-rate venue. Each individual had clearly worked on their body language with mincing walk, limply flapping hands and good interaction with their nightclub audience. Havana provided an opportunity for couples to dance in a Hispanic style and this too was embraced with enthusiasm by your younger dancers.

Stage Management – Mike Linham, Helen Bulman and Crew

The simple but effective hired set used illuminated signs to designate several of the locations. At this performance there was a brief delay with the smooth repositioning of the hanging signs after the 'Havana' scenes. However the signs and room sets for nightclub, sewer and Mission were for the most part operated silently and efficiently by the stage crew, with cast members giving a hand with furniture as befitting their roles. Sweeping the open stage to cover one of the more complex scene changes from Havana back to Broadway was a useful ploy, particularly after the choreographed pandemonium of the previous few moments.

Lighting – Chris Sealy and Crew

The professional lighting team ensured that all areas of the stage were appropriately lit. For my own part, I could not see the benefit of slowly flashing the signs during the 'Guys and Dolls' duet between Nathan and Benny, preferring to focus on the singers, but would presume that this was a directorial decision. The orange backlight gave a lovely warming glow to the Havana scene without the need for complex scenery and the moon against a beautiful blue background was a perfect location for romance.

Sound - Joe Tong and Lewis Packham

A professional rig with functioning mics throughout. My perception was that the mics started a bit loud but settled during the first ten minutes of the show. It is sometimes more difficult for the ear to adjust to accents when it is also having to cope with a greater volume than feels right, but it is not always possible to suit everyone!

Properties - Mo and Andy Pickford

The best props are often invisible; by that I mean that they are so appropriate that they are not noticed. That was largely the case in this show where, notably in the opening scene and in 'Cuba' the many accoutrements were brought on and off at such speed and in such numbers that they almost passed by unnoticed. There are times, however, when a prop is needed which adds to audience understanding. In that context, particularly as 'Fugue for Tinhorns' is not the easiest of opening numbers for the audience to interpret, it might have been helpful if the newspapers had clearly been headed 'Racing Post' or similar. I loved the accoutrements at Adelaide's kitchen-shower batchelorette party. However perfection is not always required – Adelaide's handkerchief had been ironed flat, surely if kept in a woman's handbag and in almost constant use, it would have had folds, or even creases! The box in which Nathan's 'belt' was offered was much too small to hold a man's belt and you could have got an extra laugh out of making the box said to contain Adelaide's bridal veil much larger and more cumbersome. I am aware that one cannot mess around with valuable instruments, but the big drum could perhaps have had its plastic skins disguised with some cream cardboard with the 'Save our Soul Mission' painted, rather than printed on it. These minor suggestions do not detract from the fact that there were numerous props, used to provide context which were managed very efficiently.

Wardrobe, Hair and Make-up - Di Gifford , Marie Salter and Assistants

Despite opening Pathe film footage of 1933, the flavour of your part-hired, part-self-sourced costuming for women was somewhat more 1950s with those many halter-necked day dresses, but it worked for me with the make-up and hair in the same style. Although there was little contrast in quality of suiting between the successful , respected Sky and the impoverished Nathan and his associates, there was a great visual contrast between the grey/brown sharp suits of the crapshooters and the red of the sometimes sizeable army of missionaries. Ideally your men at Havana, could have had brighter 'tropical' shirts to match their partners (loved the red satin frilly shirt sported by one of the waiters) but I appreciate that there are always budget constraints. Although he had, as might have been expected, failed to button up his coat correctly, the drunken man was the smartest and cleanest I have ever seen and should perhaps have been 'spruced down' a little. The only costume which seemed 'out of period' was Sarah's Havana dress. A modestly styled plain 50s summer dress would have been in period here.

Group and Individual performances

The Crapshooters

It is a fortunate society who have so many male performers of mixed ages who can both dance and sing well and also do both simultaneously. This show was made for you and you were clearly having a ball. An excellent effort by the whole team.

The Hot Box girls

A great group of gigglers, with the guts to dance in scanty underwear. Well done.

The Mission

Suitably committed in intention and sombre when in role; I am aware that you were also playing many of the other ensemble parts so you did have a chance to dance and to smile!

Arvide Abernathy – Rob Trayhurn

A small role but your sympathetic personality shone through and you have a beautiful gentle singing voice. You played it 'English' but it worked. Well done.

Sky Masterson – Dean Wilson

I was not entirely convinced by your opening demeanour that you were a high roller in the crapshooter community and your American accent took a while to be established. However your interactions with Sarah and developing affection for her were entirely convincing as were those more introspective moments. I very much enjoyed your performance with that lovely rich singing voice. Very well done.

Sarah Brown – Eronwy Selwyn (aged 19)

You are blessed with a high soprano voice which any woman would envy and used it to great effect in this role, most notably in that lovely introspective first duet 'I'll Know'. Although young, you delivered a confident performance with a good command of accent and beautifully clear diction. The 'in denial' relationship with Sky was believable but there were moments, particularly in Act 1, when your body language did not quite fit the maturity of a Salvationist who, whilst promoted to Sergeant at a relatively young age, was suffering inner mental turmoil. Your portrayal of the

inebriated Sarah in Havana was the moment when, for me, you started to relax into the role. This is a big part and you played it well. Thank you for your major contribution to the show.

Miss Adelaide - Jess Stradling

For me, and judging by the laughter and the applause you received, for many of the audience this was the stand-out individual performance of this show and your 'Sue Me' duet with Nathan with handbag and glove action stole the show. You looked and acted the part, ditsy blonde showgirl (with that permanent cold) but ultimately strong female, great dancer, well-sustained accent and big personality. I have no idea how you managed the speak/shriek, sing/shriek aspects without losing your voice completely! An excellent effort.

Nathan Detroit - Paul Parsons

I cannot deny being surprised to see a more mature actor playing this role but, after fourteen years with Adelaide, why not a few greyer hairs? The two of you worked well together; I loved those Eskimo kisses. Your anguish at having to choose between Adelaide and your (other) favourite pursuit, crapshooting, was perhaps all the more realistic for being depicted by someone with more life-experience. It was clear to the audience that you were enjoying playing Nathan and as noted above, the 'Sue Me' duet with Miss Adelaide was a show stopper. A great performance. Thank you.

Nicely Nicely Johnson – Liam Frampton

You worked this character part with real confidence, maintaining both accent and cheeky chappie persona throughout. Great interactions with the other crapshooters, notably your best mate Benny. An excellent supporting performance.

Benny Southstreet – Joe Houlihan

Lovely duo work in song and movement with Nicely Nicely. Good attention to accent, well done.

Big Jule - Matt Taylor

You were clearly having fun playing the socially awkward but slightly scary big man and you added a wonderful baseline to the crapshooter chorus.

In Conclusion

This was a very enjoyable show in the tradition of Glastonbury and Street Musical Comedy Society, a testimony to the hours of preparation by all involved both on and off the stage. Thank you for inviting me.