

ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

ADJUDICATOR: Caroline Joy

Amateur theatre is enjoying a renaissance at present with a number of high profile musicals being released onto the amateur market, thus introducing a younger audience to the world of live musical theatre. A favourite being 'Sister Act', and Glastonbury and Street MCS had the opportunity to stage it for the first time as a group at the Strode Theatre. This was far from amateur in terms of production and performance which came from the cast, director, MD, Orchestra, and crew. G&SMCS have put everything into this production of 'Sister Act' with period appropriate sets that still enabled our focus to stay on the actors. Some of the sets and costumes sparkled more than any pantomime outfits one may see later this year. The set adapted with seamless versatility between numbers so the audience could appreciate the scenery (professionally sourced, and included impressive yet simple backdrops) without feeling overwhelmed. This included the Cathedral, Police Station, Bar and Eddie's apartment which suited the stage. The set was brought to life with creative and sympathetic lighting design, courtesy of Chris Sealy, especially the streams of holy light in the gothic cathedral, gleaming through the stained glass windows, which made for a rather resplendent effect. The scene changes were swift and smooth throughout and lighting and sound cues appeared well prompted.

Director, Matthew Maisey, clearly worked hard on characterisation and vocal projection with his cast as the diction and clarity of words along with accents were very good which meant the story could be followed easily. Snappy direction made this a most enjoyable show. The dialogue and songs were well studied and motivated with fine accents, confident body language, mannerisms and movements. The chase scene was an inspired slapstick routine with some stage combat supported by good choreography which led us to the emotional climax of the show. Staging and stage business was well thought out with good use of entrances and exits, the only issue one had was with some of the blocking and proxemics.

There is a desire to be naturalistic when characters are in dialogue with each other and this means facing each other; however some facial expressions were lost due to too much time facing side on to the audience. Perhaps delivering the lines positioned more at an angle would allow the audience to feel more inclusive at these intimate times or when a character is listening they could turn out so we can see the internal reactions/emotions more. However on the whole, Matthew's vision and obvious understanding of stage spectacle made this polished production a treat for the senses and he should be justly proud of 'Sister Act.' He has given the audiences a show to remember.

The orchestra under the baton of Kathryn Stevens (who has taken my breath away more than once when I have adjudicated performances with Kathryn as musical director) have to be congratulated. Kathryn led an excellent orchestra and sympathetically accompanied the singers throughout. The standard of singing was very high, especially considering the demanding score and a great deal of hard work and rehearsal must have gone in to making this so. Amateur productions often don't produce such a crisp and clean faultless performance and they kept the pace going along nicely. They wouldn't have been out of place in a main theatre orchestra pit. It was great to see the orchestra involved with the action, and get their moment in the spotlight, which included the pop up Pope!

Choreography from Sarah Neale was clever, tight, with well executed formations and showing off both talent and skill. The numbers were well rehearsed and everyone was clearly having a ball up there. The formations were very effective. TJ, Joey and Pablo's

routine will stick in my head for a long time! There was vibrancy and energy to the dance sequences, even with most of the cast in habits. This gave the routines wonderful upper body tableaux that looked impressive from the audience. There were plenty of funky moves from the Motown and disco era.

The costumes and make-up were just right for the era of 1977 Philadelphia and the closing glitter only added to the razzmatazz of the show which was highly enjoyable. These final sequences had the audience on their feet in full appreciation of what they had witnessed. It was a remarkable piece of planning by the wardrobe department, led by Di Gifford and Lynn Epps - well done, ladies, for making this production so colourful and 70s style.

Deloris Van Cartier (Natasha Green) shone as the sexy, earthy and mischievous wannabe diva. Her energy and enthusiasm was infectious as she strutted and shimmied and eventually coached the convent choir to new heights resulting in the Pope visiting their concert. Her performance was of a very high quality, with an impressive vocal range. Green is the whole package, she can sing, act and move with style. She was particularly strong in the upbeat gospel numbers but her rendition of the thoughtful, 'Sister Act' was technically first-rate. Here is a star of the future whose performance was like that of a seasoned veteran.

Karen Squance as the initially suspicious **Mother Superior** played the role of matriarch skilfully and her journey from rejection to acceptance of her guest was a joy to watch. An abundance of talent and experience was evident for all to see in the interpretation of Mother Superior. Karen's rendition of, 'I Haven't Got A Prayer' was outstanding and the right amount of gravitas was brought to the character, together with a dry sense of humour and good comic timing. Each word either spoken or sung was delivered with precision and clarity. She was a perfect balance to the brash Deloris, their scenes together showing the respect and affection that in time existed between them. Mother Superior's interaction with Brian Epps as Monsignor O'Hara was also a joy, a great repartee.

As **Monsignor O'Hara**, Epps slowly transformed from the venerable Priest to a hip promoter. This was a well-rounded character with dignity, warmth, good comic timing and hilarious stage business when reacting to the various events that were unfolding around him.

(Sweaty) Eddie, the hapless cop played by Paul Dyke was one of the stars of the show. His clumsy approach to policing and complete lack of confidence faded away as the show progressed as his confidence grew along with his feelings towards Delores. Paul performed with wonderful sensitivity, wit and energy. His sublime voice was showcased beautifully when he delivered with deep and passionate yearning his performance of, 'I Could Be That Guy'. This almost brought the house down (and his trousers!) complete with numerous costume changes.

A total of 21 nuns starred in this production with notable performances by Charlie Wood as the excitable **Sister Mary Patrick** - great characterisation from Charlie and sustained throughout, as did the grumpy **Sister Mary Lazarus** (Jo McCartney) who proved to be an excellent comedienne and transformed into cool rapper. Jess Michelmores was an impressive and convincing **Sister Mary Robert**, who grew throughout the show from a youthful coy postulant nun through to a confident woman who through Deloris learned how to use her voice in many ways. Her main song, 'The Life I Never Led', was beautifully sung and she sensationally belted out the high register. The chorus of Nuns deserve some real praise for their great singing, (which was full of strong and uplifting harmonies),

movement and characterisations, especially **Sister Mary Theresa** (Charmaine Bray) and **Sister Mary Martin-of-Tours** (Judi Neale). The production also made use of the society's male chorus to good effect. The versatile Chorus moved from playing nuns to shabby and desolate homeless people, then to chorus line style all accompanied by superb singing, and along with the contrasting characters of **Michelle** (Jess Stradling) and **Tina** (Claire Switzer), as Dolores backing singers breathed life on to the stage.

Mark Wall as the deep voiced, hirsute, power dressing, **Curtis**, the gangland boss was convincingly menacing in his pursuit of ex-girlfriend Deloris after she witnessed him killing another man. This menace was suitably emphasised in the number, 'When I Find My Baby'.

TJ (Liam Frampton) was a few bullets short of a gun. Characterisation was suitably goofy and the seduction techniques displayed were priceless! **Joey** (Glynn Webster) had that 70's porn look going on crossed with an Italian mobster. An oily character prone to rolling his pelvis was well portrayed. **Pablo** (Tristan Hann) was the suave chauvinist whose self-belief in his male sexual potency was hilarious.

Joey, Pablo and TJ softened the air of menace with pure comedic value, timing and slapstick with their 'gangsta' triumvirate, with sustained characterisation, body language and good strong voices. Good repartee with other characters was well established. Their musical numbers were superb. 'Lady in The Long Black Dress' actually had me in tears – I cannot remember the last time I laughed like that during a show.

This production was a glittering tribute to the eternal power of friendship, full of confidence and sass and with a 70's pop style soundtrack, you couldn't fail to come out of the theatre and rejoice with a big smile on your face – 'Fabulous Baby'. Thank you so much for the wonderful hospitality, courtesy of Henry Tinney. Both I and my friend were very well looked after. I look forward to seeing you again in the future.