



Society : Woodley Light Operatic Society
Production : West End Hits
Date : 10th December 2016
Venue : Oakwood Centre, Woodley
Report by : Judith Watsham

Show Report

Thank you very much for the kind invitation to review this production as your usual rep was unable to attend on this occasion.

Very many thanks to your very attentive Front of House staff who gave me a lot of additional information about Woodley LOS which, as a guest reviewer, I found helpful.

You had some very interesting arrangements of hits from the shows concerned and many of them had really lovely harmonies which you performed very well. I am guessing here, but I think that one of your strengths as a group lies in your ability to hold your line – a talent that some other groups have lost. This showed to good effect several times, including in the unaccompanied number when I noticed that all of you had your eyes firmly glued on your MD. Very well done!

Compilation shows are not as easy to get right as many people think. With a musical there is a recognisable story line and everyone from principals to ensemble has the opportunity to get to grips with a character. You gave your audience such a wide range of music from pre-war musicals to shows currently performing in London that very few of the soloists had the opportunity to get into character. However, I would ask that all of you consider the words and the context in which the songs were performed in the original shows. Without exception all the best performed numbers were sung in the character of each show. One other point I feel I should make here too is that there are two very important elements to get right in a show like this, actually knowing the words and smiling. There were one or two of you who were uncertain at times which meant that you looked rather worried and your concentration led you to lose that vital happy smile!

I liked your staging, which I gather is the one you usually use in this context. The well lit slash curtains and cabaret tables and chairs worked well and gave different levels. Jo Hunt your Stage Manager kept things moving well and Dinrino Theatre Services provided the light and sound for you.

Gemma Bagshaw, your MD, and her small band were well positioned fairly high up stage right which also worked well as none of your singers were miked. Had the band been any nearer I think that they would have drowned out some of the soloists. One small criticism Gemma, would it have been possible to adopt a sort of ‘vamp until ready’ sound when the company was shifting position? Which they did between every number. They moved in a near black out and all we heard was an irritating clatter of shoes on the hard floor.

A good programme, Jane Murphy and Jasper McGuire, and thank you for the informative NODA page, but I would have liked to see some cast photographs. You had a credit for photos in the programme but they were not there! Good to see you advertising your next two shows however, always well worth plugging them as soon as possible.

Jane Murphy, who directed and choreographed the show, assisted by Claire Rowell did a very good job although I would have liked to have seen more movement, especially in the first half. Your groupings were good but a little too static at times. You don't need to dance to achieve movement of course, a bit of orchestrated swaying and/or arm movements always works well and adds visual interest, especially as there were quite a lot of straight lines on occasion.

I didn't think that some of the somewhat apologetic little bobs after each solo were quite right. Better perhaps just to smile at the applause and step back into your place. Also, and this is directed at the men, please, please polish your shoes – most of you had lovely shiny shoes which meant that those whose shoes had not seen a shoe brush recently stood out.

I think you can understand that it is not possible to mention every single soloist so I will simply highlight what I considered to be your best numbers without actually singling anyone out; you all know who you are!

In the first half there were three outstanding company numbers: Thoroughly Modern Millie had some very good choreography in it; Pure Imagination was sung beautifully and the Beach Boys Medley was performed enthusiastically, particularly by one of the men. I also liked two duets, Sisters and High Flying Adored.

In Act II you all really came alive and moved well. Thank you for the Music was, for me, rather slow, although sung well, but Burning' Love, 76 Trombones and, the best number in the show in my opinion, Skimbleshanks, were very good indeed. This last had good interesting movement and was very well sung indeed. The duet Raining on Prom Night was excellent and What is this Feeling was one of the best acted numbers in the show. Both girls put over the song in the context of Wicked in a way that was lacking in some of the other numbers.

Finally, your encore from The Sound of Music, worked very well indeed in this show and brought the afternoon to a satisfactory conclusion. Thank you again for inviting me and I wish you well with your two 2017 productions.

Judith Watsham
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