

## NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2017-18

Brantham Amateur Theatrical Society  
“Sister Act” directed by Pippa Revell  
Adjudicated by Kate Sheffield assisted by Val Taylor  
15/2/18

### INTRODUCTION

Knowing that most of the tickets for this production had been sold prior to performances it was not surprising to find a cheerful “buzz” of anticipation as we entered the hall. There was an efficient, friendly welcome with professional looking programmes thrust into our hands as we were ushered to seats which gave us a clear view of the entire acting area.

### SETTING

The stage, extended downstage right to accommodate the musicians, ensured sight lines were not lost and a smaller extension, down left, set apart the Police Station. This allowed as much space as possible on the main stage for the large cast to move reasonably easily. The organisation of flats, constructed to create the appearance of heavy stone walls, was skilfully carried out by the stage crew to create alleyways, church walls and a nightclub. Indeed, the stage crew, managed by Phil Burns, moved quickly, quietly and speedily as they handled the many changes to create each new place of action. This was an impressive, flexible set handled at all times with speed and efficiency. The props and stage dressing, at all times, allowed the stage to remain uncluttered.

### LIGHTING

Clinton Bratchell’s lighting design created a good contrast in the atmosphere of the various venues in which the action took place. The projected images seen prior to the start gave a clear suggestion of where we were to be taken. The contrast of venues- Nightclub to Convent- both with a dark element, was clearly defined; bright splashes of light in the nightclub, subdued atmosphere in the convent. At all times characters could clearly be seen without any sharp spotlight breaking the atmosphere. The lighting changes happened smoothly and subtly, enhancing the action. Well done!

### SOUND

A large cast, plenty of movement and mics could be a source of disaster on a small stage. However, the cast were controlled in movement and mics were well-organised. There was just one moment when somebody’s mic crackled but this was soon resolved. Greg Garrad controlled the sound well so that voices were not drowned out by instruments. Effects were well-timed. Well done!

## COSTUME

Tina Burns did a magnificent job on the costumes; there must have been an army of assistants. The programme indicated that they were all sourced by the group and not hired in. They reflected character well-the Nun's outfits were a great contrast to the gold and leopard skin of the Nightclub at the beginning. Changes were quickly achieved and variety helped the visual impact. This aspect of the show was well organised, and to good effect.

## MUSIC/CHOREOGRAPHY

With limitation of space, John Hoskyns and Amanda Powell devised sound and movement to suit the venue successfully. Whilst the music was lively, it never overwhelmed the singing but accompanied sympathetically. Obviously well-rehearsed, the songs were delivered confidently and were well-interpreted. The band played enthusiastically to give an accomplished performance. Choreography was kept simple, with the different abilities of the cast being considered. The opening number in the club quickly set the scene and that of the "gang" was accomplished with apparent ease. The input of effort certainly reaped reward!

## PERFORMANCES

**DELORIS:** From the start, Jacquie Lewis confidently "lived" this character. She had a confident, clear voice both singing and speaking. Reactions to her dilemma of hiding in the convent were both amusing and believable. Jacquie's expression and movement reflected this character well. Her behaviour in different situations showed the changing attitudes as circumstances changed. This was an admirable performance.

**MOTHER SUPERIOR:** Geneva Downes certainly made this character a complete contrast to that of Deloris. Her thoughts were well conveyed through facial expression and her general movement was controlled and dignified. Geneva reflected a calmness in this performance but a growing empathy for Deloris could have displayed development of the character.

**EDDIE:** This characterisation grew into a pleasing performance from the moment Arjan Van Heuveln sang his solo. He demonstrated a stronger personality both as a Police Officer and in expressing his feelings for Deloris when he clearly showed he "could be that guy". Rounding up "the gang" was slick and movement was positive.

**SISTER MARY LAZARUS:** Appearing as a warm, caring nun, Angie Heath certainly looked quietly confident and comfortable in her nun's robes. She moved with ease, showing a character contented in her environment though displaying little humour! Angie's communication with others appeared natural. A believable characterisation.

**SISTER MARY PATRICK:** Jessica Ford had a clear voice and her characterisations were lively. Obviously a strong personality within this group of nuns, there was variety and interest in her performance.

SISTER MARY ROBERTS: A young nun, intrigued by the new “nun” in their midst, Rebecca Hoskyns defined her character clearly- a quiet, somewhat shy individual who, until encouraged by Deloris, seemed unable to express her feelings. However, it seemed that the realisation, that there was more to life, was rather suddenly displayed. The growing confidence could have been rather more gradually displayed. However, the reprise certainly conveyed a young nun with a mind of her own.

SISTER MARY THERESA: Reacting well within the chorus of nuns, Fiona Morris moved easily and always appeared confident, sustaining her character clearly at each appearance.

SISTER MARY of TOURS: Looking calm and controlled, Lisa Butler maintained a well-defined character. She looked at ease in her nun’s outfit and with her other “sisters”.

MONSIGNOR O’HARA: Geoff Hewitson’s first appearance lacked the impact his position merited and his dialogue could have shown greater authority. However, this improved and at the beginning of Act 2, as he moved through the auditorium, the performance showed the character well-his position in this community and his relationship with the nuns. He became a believable Monsignor.

CURTIS: There was consistency in David Chilton’s performance which had strength in delivery of dialogue and song. His facial expression was good and the controlling manner of movement certainly conveyed the nature of this character. The use of hands, for example, to convey the meanness of Curtis, worked well. This was a good performance.

JOEY, PABLO, JT: Alex Terry, Mark Hinson and Jesse Hawkins moved very well and maintained believable individuality of character, whilst working extremely well together as a “gang”. Their evil behaviour was maintained throughout and all three used their eyes expressively to communicate both to each other and respond to Curtis. They certainly made an impact on the audience, well done!

TINA/NUN CHORUS: Always adaptable, Lesley Mercer contrasted these roles very well. As Tina, she helped to open the show with her vitality, in both her singing and dancing in the Nightclub. In contrast, but still with plenty of verve, she took on the more subdued role of nun with more gentle movement and expression. An admirable transition!

MICHELLE/NUN CHORUS: With lovely movement, Sophie established herself well as the other Nightclub dancer. She moved with ease and appeal and completely changed her demeanour to become a nun- unrecognisable as the same actress. Well done!

NUN’S CHORUS: Each quite clearly showed an individual character which, when working together, created an interesting “watch”. The singing was harmonious and amusingly “awful” on one occasion! There was variety in what was sung but it was obvious that everyone was singing from the same hymn sheet-well rehearsed and energetic! Well done!

ADULT CHORUS: Again their enthusiasm and confidence resulted in good expressive singing. Facial expression and awareness of each other created lively musical theatre.

CHILDREN'S CHORUS: At all times everyone in this group appeared completely immersed in the character so that, assisted by costume, each was a recognisable type. They responded well and moved well.

## PRODUCTION

As producer, Tina Burns certainly had plenty to keep her occupied in preparation of the show. Performance indicated that Pippa Revell's vision of the production was clearly translated to all those involved. The cast demonstrated cohesion and commitment necessary to achieve consistency in performance level, regardless of importance of the part. The singing of the Nun's Chorus showed versatility. The chase in Act 2 was extremely well organised to have pace, not easy in a confined space. Pace generally was good, assisted by the efficiency of the stage crew, quiet and quick! Costume changes never seemed to delay. Indeed, the attention to detail was excellent and the efforts of all produced a most enjoyable evening!

Best wishes

Kate Sheffield (Adjudicator)