

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2022-2023

Brantham Amateur Theatrical Society

Guys & Dolls

Directed by Pippa Revell,

Adjudicated by Amanda Powell, assisted by Glynis Cummings

17/02/2023

FRONT OF HOUSE

It was lovely to see a full house on entry. The FOH staff were very efficient and welcoming. We were shown to our seat's, and they checked we were happy with the seats chosen for us, which I found very thoughtful. The programme looked very slick and professional. It had plenty of interesting information to peruse with pictures and info of all the cast and crew. I especially liked the history of the musical section, a nice informative addition to the programme.

SETTING/STAGE MANAGEMENT

I must commend the people who came up with the design for this set. As I walked into the theatre the stage immediately grabbed my attention. The 'Guys & Doll's' light-up logo on the star cloth looked very professional and eye catching. The creativeness of the 'jigsaw puzzle' set was very impressive; from the way the doors popped out to be used somewhere else, or as something else, the flats on rollers that rotated and the back flats that opened out to create a completely new set, to the more intricate details, such as the lovely silhouetted New York skyline across the top of the set, the lamppost, fire hydrant, neon signs, and other advertisement signs dotted around the stage were so cleverly conceived.

The stage management team were quick, quiet and efficient with all the complicated scene changes, meaning the band didn't need to 'vamp' for any length of time throughout the show, this meant the audience were able to remain engaged, in fact you had timed your movements so well it almost looked like a little dance!

Props were very well done. I especially appreciated the papers (which seemed to have authentic looking news stories on the front cover) and the changing bulletin news board. I also liked all the bar paraphernalia used in the Havana scene, with fabulous coconut shell Dulce De Leche drinks.

LIGHTING AND SOUND

A well-lit stage, I am not a fan of having to squint to see a performer, so I was delighted to find that the lighting was not at all patchy, and the audience could see clearly at every point during the show. Good use of the follow spots throughout.

Sound was well controlled. The balancing of the band, and the actor's microphones took until the end of 'Fugue for Tinhorns' to level out completely, and unfortunately I couldn't really hear Rusty against the others. I am aware this is not always a mic issue and can sometimes be an actor not projecting enough for the mic to pick them up, but either way, once it had levelled the sound was clear and strong throughout the rest of the performance.

MUSIC

Congratulations to John Hoskyns and the band. Your use of both digital orchestra and live band sounded fantastic and you supported the cast sympathetically throughout, providing a harmonious balance between band and voices. You were a pleasure to listen to.

COSTUME

It's always a big task to dress a large cast, so it was great to see Tina Burns and the wardrobe team achieve this. There were a few dresses/costumes that were not quite the correct period, but as most of them looked so nice it didn't really matter. I would have perhaps had General Cartwright in a closer matching Sally Army uniform, perhaps even a basic red blouse and slightly longer black skirt with the General's epaulettes added, as the frilly shirt and jacket she wore looked a little more like she was going horse-riding and not the correct period. I loved all the men's suits, especially Benny's. They really helped the audience to immediately know the period and style the musical was set in, and some of the men had fabulous spat like brogues/oxfords, which I love! The ladies Hot box outfits were good, and I especially liked Adelaide's fluffy trimmed dressing gown and Sarah's green dress she wore to Havana.

CHOREOGRAPHY

Frankie Swan's choreography contained a lot of variety and was within the capabilities of those performing.

I did feel on a few occasions that some of the movement wasn't always in-keeping with the period and style of the musical, also occasionally tending to veer into dance school territory. But all the cast took to the dancing elements of this show with gusto, it was just a shame there were so many on the stage at any one time, as movements became restricted and therefore a little messy at times.

A possible way to combat this on a small stage when you have a large cast is to have half the ensemble in one company number and the other half in another, thereby keeping the stage clearer, enabling the cast to be seen and to move more freely, resulting in clear clean lines and allowing the choreographer to be able to create aesthetically pleasing shapes, tableaux and patterns.

The Hot Box girls were fun to watch, but I did feel both their numbers lacked some of the sex appeal required.

I especially liked the torch sequence in the sewer as it showed a very strong and clear style, but again the dancers were hindered by too many 'crap gamers' to complete clean lines and tableaux.

Another notable and strong moment was the dancing between Ryan Lenney and Grace Bach (whose lines were beautifully extended). Both the choreography and their characterisation were strong throughout this scene and a delight to watch.

DIRECTION

It's always a challenge to fit a large cast on to a small stage. While it's fabulous to see so many people wanting to be part of an amateur musical theatre group, I did feel there were moments of overcrowding which hindered the ensemble numbers and often distracted from the main storytelling. As I mentioned previously, an idea to combat overcrowding etc. whilst still allowing all cast members to have quality 'stage time' would be to split the ensemble in half and have them in separate scenes, thereby creating more space, cleaner lines, and the ability to create stronger staging for ensemble numbers. This would also ensure the audience would have much better visibility of all cast members throughout. There were a few one-to-one integral principal scenes which did not require anyone else on the stage with them, as it was a little distracting, and although I appreciate BATS is very family orientated, I'm not sure it was quite right to have young children at the crap game in the sewers.

Having said that, Pippa does have a very good knack of getting a cast to perform with gusto as well as helping them convey the tender and softer emotions with sincerity. The staging for

the principal scenes were good and you could clearly see, by the obvious enjoyment of the cast that Pippa is a respected director who the cast have a strong rapport with.

PERFORMANCES

GEORGIE SPALL (Sarah Brown): We see Sarah start out as a very conservative, kind-hearted missionary who finds her adventurous side, fall in love with Sky, and the anguish their differences bring. I felt Georgie didn't always quite manage to convey these changing emotions in the first half, but started coming into her own, showing Sarah's adventurous and fun side (not sure I would like to take her on in a drunken fight!) in Act 2. Georgie has a very pretty voice with a pleasant trill, and a nice belt in her chest voice. Perhaps try to project the vocals a little more when singing in your head voice. The tender moments with Sky were lovely to watch and she held her own in 'Marry the Man today', which is a tough song to handle!

RYAN LENNEY (Sky Masterson): He is a charming and lucky gambler who likes to share his anecdotes and views of the world. We see his turmoil as he meets 'the one' and his ultimate ability to change.

Ryan had a natural acting style that was suited to Sky. He had a nice vocal tone, with a clear singing voice and seemed confident and relaxed in this role. His tender moments with Sarah were nice and I especially liked his connection and strong dance skills with Grace during the dancing in Havana.

SIAN REES (Miss Adelaide): This is such a great role to get your teeth into and Sian mostly achieved this. Because of Adelaide's squeaky New York accent, it's very easy to overplay her and become shrill, so using vocal and visual light and shade as well as comic timing is essential. Sian had great stage presence and showed the heartbreak and frustration of being engaged for 14 years to a 'no good' craps game organiser well, I really felt for her! I particularly liked her rendition of 'Adelaide's Lament'.

TOM HITCHCOCK (Nathan Detroit): Tom portrayed the commitment phobe Nathan extremely well. He conveyed the air of someone constantly 'on the make' beautifully throughout and did a great job of pacifying Adelaide, with promises of marriage 'some time'! Good singing voice, although keep an eye on your pitching on occasions, and very strong character work and comic timing.

ROB WARNE (Nicely-Nicely Johnson): He is the good natured, constantly hungry lackey of Nathan Detroit. He has an air of naivety, with a cheery and sincere disposition, which Rob played well. Although a little quiet at times you tackled the difficult number 'Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat' well. Nicely-nicely done Rob!

JAMES WETHERALL (Benny Southstreet): He is one of Nathan's friends and James caught my attention immediately with his natural, confident, and relaxed acting style. James really knows how to command the stage. Very strong acting, and vocals.

DAVID CHILTON (Arvide Abernathy): This was a nice warm interpretation of the good-intentioned leader of the Times Square Salvation Army. David was lovely to watch, with a fabulous singing voice and delightful tonal qualities. David came into his own during his solo, which was beautifully and sensitively portrayed. Just take a care not to rush when you deliver your lines.

ARJAN VAN HEUVEIN (Lt Brannigan): Arjan looked right at home on the stage and convincingly portrayed the lieutenant's air of authority and frustration at never quite catching the dastardly gamblers!

KELLIE MORGAN (General Matilda Cartwright): She is an authoritative but caring leader of the Save-a-Soul Mission which Kellie acted beautifully and with gusto. A very pleasing performer to watch.

ENSEMBLE

HOT BOX LADIES: Excellent dancing and good facial expressions from most of the ladies throughout., although I would have liked to have seen a little more sex appeal from some of you in your characterisations at points. Well done for handling all the dance numbers so well in crowded conditions, not an easy task.

GANGSTERS/ENSEMBLE: Good 'rat pack' style portrayals from the gangsters, who all looked excellent in their suits & hats. Nice characterisation of a scary, unemotional, and slightly dim Big Julie from Mark Hinson and strong, commanding acting from Paul Morgan as Harry the Horse.

A strong and well-rehearsed ensemble who worked really well as a team. You all handled yourselves well in 'Sit Down Your Rocking the Boat'. I especially liked the section where the crap gamers briefly joined in the 'torch dance' in the sewer. Accents, overall, were strong.

YOUTH ENSEMBLE:

How nice to see so many enthusiastic young performers! Each one gave strong performances, knowing exactly what they should be doing and where they should be at every moment. Well done.

OVERALL PRODUCTION

A well-rehearsed production that was very entertaining. The principles portrayed their characters well. The set was extremely effective and of a very high standard. Lighting was very good; the Band was delightful to listen to and the music and sound levels were mostly correct. The transitions from scene to scene were nice and smooth. The staging and choreography were of a generally good standard and the dancing was enjoyable. There were lots of highlights and individual strong performances and I found this production to be mostly well-conceived and full of fun, you certainly all looked like you were having a good time! It was a pleasure to watch a good variety of talent. Well done BATS!

Best wishes

Amanda Powell (Adjudicator)