



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Starmaker Youth Theatre Company
Production : Annie
Date : Friday 10th March 2017
Venue : South Hill Park Arts Centre - Bracknell
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

Show Report

I was delighted to be asked to review Annie. It is one of those feel good musicals that has everything; great characters, witty yet poignant dialogue, humour and memorable tuneful songs. This particular production had been extremely well cast with some outstanding performances from the young actors.

Knowing this was Dave Savage's farewell performance with Starmaker I am guessing the last night was highly charged and very emotional.

Polly Coombes – (Annie) – What a talent this young lady is! She was an absolute joy to watch bringing a breath of fresh air to the stage. Her acting was first rate with energetic dynamic dialogue, animated facial expressions and peppy vital movement. She displayed real attitude and I enjoyed the magic in the relationship between her and Warbucks, and delighted in the way she played off Miss Hannigan. She has a sublime singing voice; able to belt when needed but also capable of soft sweet tenderness. "Tomorrow" was superb but my favourite was "Maybe". I feel this youngster is destined to reach great heights.

Stuart Hayllor – (Oliver Warbucks) – Having read this young man's bio I see that he started out as a young performer with Starmaker and directed Rent giving back what the craft he learnt from them by sharing his knowledge and expertise. How fitting then that he should return to the stage with them in this role. He was truly outstanding his characterisation was brusque and dominant softening under the avid gaze of Annie. The relationship he forged with Annie was quite delectable and the heartache and anguish he felt when he thought he had lost her was intensely palpable. He has a superb singing voice and all his numbers were first rate but none more so than "Something was Missing" which was meritorious.

Katie Upton – (Miss Hannigan) – This was a triumph in character acting. Her coarse accent enhanced her dialogue greatly and the intonation she achieved was superb. Her unsteady movement made us genuinely believe she was drunk; which so often can be overdone, however she had it off to perfection. She had expressive visuals and her movement appeared laboured which was right for the character but was in fact anything but. I enjoyed her "Little Girls" which was sung in character with immense feeling.

Natalie Cox – (Grace Farrell) – I cannot believe this young lady is only sixteen! In a role that can so often disappear into the back ground she gave a sophisticated and mature performance of the highest quality. Her dialogue had a wonderfully rhythmic lilt and her character warm affectionate and liberal. She has a superlative singing voice and brought all the number she was involved in to life; especially "I Think I'm Gonna Like it Here" and "A New Deal for Christmas"

Jacob Marshall – (Rooster Hannigan) – This was a standout performance! He was flashy and self-assured whilst bringing a great deal of fun to the character. His dialogue was animatedly energetic and his facial expressions were vivid and cocksure. His movement was outstanding being smooth casual and easy; throughout “Easy Street” my eye was drawn to him constantly which made me smile because I enjoyed his performance so much!

Saffron Harrington – (Lily St. Regis) – As Rooster’s dizzy blonde girlfriend this young lady had perfected a sassy flippant character. Her dialogue was well delivered with great inflection and her movement complimented her brash persona. I liked the way she changed her stature and voice to accommodate Shirley Mudge. Her part in “Easy Street” was well sung and she really came to life throughout the routine.

Orphans – These youngsters were absolutely fantastic! They sparkled throughout giving exuberant performances which had real attitude. Their singing and movement were excellent and “Hard Knock Life” and “Never Fully Dressed” were superb.

Winnie Coombes – (Molly) – As the youngest orphan this lass gave a splendid performance. Her dialogue was clear audible and expressive whilst maintaining a good accent throughout.

Matilda Lawrence – (Pepper) – What a fiery and excitable character this young lady created! Her dialogue was nicely punctuated and her movement also followed this trend.

Millie Johnson – (Duffy) – This young lady was excellent. Her dialogue movement and singing were all of the highest order and she absolutely exuded charisma.

Warbucks Staff – Danced and sang with great energy and enthusiasm. Their voices blended well accompanied by some super harmonies. They looked great and smiled constantly which gave vitality and life to all the scenes they were involved in.

Rosie Sumner - (Mrs Pugh)

Jessica Willis - (Mrs Greer) - Both these young ladies provided us with lively characterisations with good dialogue and excellent singing.

Louis Chapman - (Drake) – This young man gave a super performance as butler to Warbucks. His dialogue was crisp clean and well projected he also had a really great singing voice and his solo pieces came over famously

Radio Scene – Everyone involved in this scene was spot on. They performed their roles with exactly the right flavour for the character and made the whole scene humorous and entertaining. Special mention to the sound effects man who looked thoroughly bored all the way through.

Alex Essery – (Bert Healy) – This was a nicely depicted character with just the right amount of “cheese”. Dialogue was well delivered and “Never Fully Dressed” sung with flair.

Seth Macleod – (Fred McCracken)

Oliver Widdis – (Wacky) – As ventriloquist and dummy these two worked exceptionally well together bringing the humour to the fore. Having matching suits really helped with the visual effect.

Jessica Willis
Rosie Sumner

Katie Weller – (The Boylan Sisters) – These three young ladies were delightful and looked super in their matching costumes and blonde wigs. Their voices complemented one another and they sang beautifully.

Dave Savage – (President Roosevelt) – With a wealth of experience to draw on this was a well delineated characterisation; congenial approachable and optimistic. Dialogue was well delivered with excellent accent diction intonation and projection.

All other Named Characters – Every character that had a line to say can be assured they did so with great skill and delivered their dialogue with a good accent good diction and good projection. A special mention to **Katie Weller** who excelled in her solo as the “Star to Be”. They all supported the main cast famously.

Ensemble – Every member of this ensemble should be extremely proud of what they achieved. They were right on the money in everything they did adding to the overall enjoyment of the performance. Their singing and dancing was executed with great aplomb and “Hooverville” was an absolute knockout!

I cannot leave out **Molly** – (Sandy the Dog) – who acquitted herself admirably and what a lot of treats she managed to acquire!

Dave Savage – (Director) – Dave really excelled in his direction for this show. He obviously inspires the youngsters and had given them clear definition on their characterisations dialogue and overall persona. Staging was cleverly worked with excellent blocking and groupings. Even when space was confined he had managed to ensure all actors could be seen with no upstaging; all of which culminated in creating a fast paced captivating and engaging piece of theatre. I can give him no greater accolade than to say that the joyfulness and enchantment that exuded from the stage to the audience was just wondrous!

Ellie Verkerk – (Musical Director) – This young lady deserves so much credit. She brought out the very best in these youngsters giving them confidence in their abilities. Whether it was principals or chorus they all had exceptional diction precise timing and secure entrances. The dynamics of the vocals was quite exquisite ensuring the lyrics were as important as the tune. She wielded her baton with a sympathetic ear keeping the orchestra to a fine accompaniment whilst the performers were singing but letting rip when they had a free hand.

Christina Barlow – (Choreographer) – assisted by apprentice choreographer **Kitty Pilgrim-Morris** I so enjoyed all the routines this young lady had created. She was not afraid to give the orphans real gritty movement that oozed attitude and was totally perfect for “Hard Knock Life”. “Hooverville” on the other hand was hard hitting making use of static positioning but delivering a real a punch. The movement she had designed for Annie and Warbucks was simple yet effective and there were some interesting patterns for the Warbucks’ staff. She had

ensured the entire cast was well drilled and I did not spot one wrong foot or move in any of the routines.

Rhi O’Keefe/Dave Savage - (Co-Producers) – Producing can be a rather thankless task so it is nice to have someone to share the load with. This pairing obviously worked well together bringing an outstanding show to a fulfilling conclusion.

Alistair McKay/Michelle Palin – (Stage Manager/Deputy SM) – What a busy stage this was; giving the SM DSM and Crew plenty to do! It was a big cumbersome set that required a lot of shifting. However other than the first change which was rather noisy and a cloth that spent the first scene manoeuvring itself from being hooked up; every change ran smoothly keeping the pace moving.

Rebecca Simmons – (Lighting Design) – operated by **Sam Tait** I really liked this imaginative plot. There was an atmospheric spot in Miss Hannigan’s office and the sinister red aspect that occurred every time the trio sang Easy Street really worked. There was warm overall stage lighting in Warbucks mansion and Hooverville appeared drear and grey. There was an excellent use of spot lights which were expertly operated by **Louis Martin/Stuart Brookfield**

Tom Horrox – (Sound Design/Operator) – I have in the past had cause to criticise the sound; however on this occasion it was absolutely outstanding. Balance was perfect with everyone on stage; whether on a radio mic or not, able to be heard.

Cathie Savage/Glynis Smith – (Costumes) – supplied by Starmaker costume hire were for the most part, excellent. However in “Hooverville” there suddenly appeared some rogue modern day dress and I noted that one of the orphans had managed to escape; if only she had, had a coat or something to cover her dress. Other than that Annie had the obligatory red dress in which she looked fab, the Warbuck’s staff had super uniforms and the principals all had apparel that really suited their characters.

Jo Stringer – (Make-up Design) – Make-up had been thought about in detail to enhance the visuals of each character. However the crowning achievement was Miss Hannigan’s make-up which really depicted her drunken state with lipstick that had completely missed her mouth.

Gemma Wilson – (Programme/Poster Design) – This design was the iconic comic strip logo and the one everyone expects to see. The programme was of good quality with clear photos and readable font. It was informative and well laid out.

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13