



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Starmaker Theatre Company
Production : Chicago High School Ed.
Date : 11th October 2019
Venue : The Wilde Theatre, Bracknell
Report by : Rob Bertwistle Regional Rep. District 12

Show Report

As I was deputising for your usual Regional Representative, Jeanette Maskell this was an opportunity for me to see another company and experience the atmosphere of a theatre which I had not visited before. There was certainly a great buzz in the auditorium in anticipation and the appreciative audience were not to be disappointed. After a slightly delayed start we were soon whisked back to the seedy and murky world of 1920's Chicago with some excellent performances from this talented group of young people from Starmaker Theatre Company.

The company was headed by a strong line-up of principals with Hayley Crofts and Destiny Andradý playing the two female leads - *Roxie Hart* and *Velma Kelly* respectively. Here were some standout performances from this talented duo. Both had great stage presence and strong vocals with very believably delivered libretto. The sparring between the two characters was well handled with some lovely comedy moments too and great eye rolling 'put downs' from both characters. Well done to you both for two memorable performances. Your duets together were very good also.

Ronan Cundy gave a lively and animated performance as the charming but sleazy lawyer Billy Flynn oozing self-confidence. Ronan had excellent stage presence and interacted well with other players. Strong vocals, particularly in *All I Care About* added to the performance but just be careful not to rush parts of the dialogue some of which was lost I felt on occasions.

Katie Weller was convincing as Matron 'Mama' Morton with strong vocal delivery and a well maintained accent. I felt 'Mama' could have been a little more 'hard-edged' and not quite so nice with her family of 'inmates' but on the whole this was a first rate performance.

I liked Alex Hutson's portrayal of Amos Hart – Roxie's luckless and down trodden husband. Alex brought just the right amount of pathos and indeed humour to the part with an excellent and heart-felt rendition of *Mister Cellophane*.

The Cell Block Tango is one of my favourite moments in the show and the group of 'merry murderesses' *Liz*, played by Hannah Guile, Robyn Warrick-Clarke as *Annie*, Matilda Lawrence as *June*, with Misty Branch and Ciara Wise as *Mona* and *Kitty* and of course not forgetting Molly McGuinness as *Katalin Hunyak* really pulled off this number with aplomb. Headed by *Velma* their re-telling of their murderous exploits was most memorable. They moved well and used the stage to good effect. I noted it was the same poor chap who got it in the end with some wonderfully skilful dancing by a very energetic Corey Aberý!

Charlie Woods was very good as the unfortunate recipient of Roxie's revenge with a convincingly executed (forgive the pun!) death. Well done Charlie!

At this point I must pay tribute to the guys in this production who were very much in demand as there were only four of you and you all fitted superbly well into the ensemble numbers when you were not taking a more prominent part in the action. Fantastic work all of you!!

Supporting the excellent principals were some super performances by Faith Wood-Blagrove as *Mary Sunshine* (be careful of clarity of diction when your voice rises though Faith), Georgina Imberg as *Officer Fogarty*, Maddie Conquer as a *Reporter*, Millie Cook as *Harrison* with Shreya Bharati as the *Clerk* and Florence Wrake as *Juror One*. As mentioned elsewhere *Harry*, a *Reporter* and the *Judge* were played by the very busy Charlie Woods and Corey Aberly.

The ensemble work was exceptional with everyone knowing the routines and positions on stage in what must have involved some well drilled rehearsal times. There was great energy and enthusiasm emanating from the stage which certainly brought a wonderful sparkle to the production so congratulations to you all.

Matthew Harcourt's inventive direction ensured that each member of the company had a chance to shine in their particular role. The principals gave very believable and passionate performances with some excellent use of the playing area and some seamlessly executed scene transitions. I really liked the naming of each member of the company in the final curtain call and having their own 'bow'. Many congratulations!

Similarly the Musical Direction by Anton Gwilt was very good with some excellent performances from the principal players with a well-rehearsed ensemble who as far as I could tell were all word perfect. All the voices blended well and most importantly the vocals were delivered with great verve and energy plus the all-important clear diction earning the performers some ecstatic applause after each number and at the final curtain call. The band was excellent - playing with flair - perfectly balancing the music with the principal and ensemble vocals.

The inspired choreography by Chloe Emily Shepherd was delivered superbly well by the company. Some great Fosse style moves and beautifully synchronised routines brought the stage to life. You must have been extremely proud of your work with the company all of whom certainly did you proud. Many congratulations Chloe.

Generally the sound worked well with the sound design by Tom Horrox providing clear and well-balanced acoustics. There was some minor gremlins in the works as the show opened but which did not detract from the performance at all.

The lighting designed and operated by Becca Simons very much enhanced the production with some dramatic moments and good use of colours to create atmosphere. Spotlight operators Stuart Brookfield and Tom Gloess ensured the principals were always well illuminated.

The very simple set design by Matthew Harcourt ensured all entrances and exits were carried out speedily and with precision. I liked the positioning of the band on the flights of steps stage left and right but felt that maybe these stairs could have been used more in the action and the band players positioned rear centre stage. Just a personal observation of course and not knowing the layout back stage this may have been impractical.

The company moved items of set dressing with skill and precision thus ensuring the action continued seamlessly. The placing and removal of the often used chairs was particularly effective.

The props assembled by Valentina Britten Holden all work well and looked in keeping with the period and setting of the production and were all used confidently by the cast members.

I've never heard the term *Costume Administrator* before but presume it means the person who is responsible for making sure the cast look good and are in appropriately styled and well-fitting costumes. If that was the case Luana Caratelli had done an excellent job as all the costumes were spot on and perfectly reflected the mood, setting and style of the production. Incidentally Luana was also the Hair and Make-up supervisor. The make-up and hair was very much 'period' and with the team of 'Parents and Friends of Starmaker' supplying no doubt much needed help the company all looked splendidly turned out. Well done!

The informative programme Designed by Gemma Wilson certainly show-cased the cast and company with plenty of background information and a picture of everyone in the company – always a nice touch!

Finally thank you to everyone concerned for a most enjoyable theatrical experience and I wish Starmaker every success with future productions. Our London Councillor Andrew Rogers who attended your matinee has written his thoughts on the production which I am sending along with this report.

Best wishes,

Rob

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NODA London Festival Weekend 13th/14th June 2020

National Operatic & Dramatic Association**London Region**

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Society : Starmaker
 Production : Chicago Jnr
 Date : 12th October 2019 - matinee
 Venue : Wilde Theatre, Bracknell
 Report by : Andrew Rogers

Show Report

I had the great pleasure to see - what is referred to as - the Understudy cast, at the Saturday matinee, and I felt the standard was high. My overall view was that there was plenty of characterisation through the movement and that the choreography both in the dance but also in general movement around the stage was both tight and fluid. I did feel there were a few volume issues for those entering from the back of the stage, in the middle of the band, and wonder whether there needed to be quicker cuing of individual mics or maybe a general stage mic positioned there.

Robyn Warrick-Clarke, gave a great performance as Velma Kelly. She was strong with a good voice and great movement. Robyn slotted well into the duets and *I can't do it Alone* was a real highlight. For me, *All that Jazz* was a little underpowered but Robyn rapidly grew into the role. Her experience really showed.

Matilda Lawrence gave Mama Morton a great voice, singing well from quite a low register. She moved well and *When You're Good to Mama* was a fine number.

Corey Abery as Amos Hart, needed more volume initially, but then the underscoring in *Funny Honey* was powerful and maybe the mic levels between him and Roxie needed adjustment. However, despite a few glove issues, Corey was really strong in *Mr Cellophane* and the audience loved him – a super song. Jessica Lambden pitched Mary Sunshine, with quite a high register – which is the traditional handling of the role. However, this is really difficult to project and she maybe needed a bit more projection and/or mic support.

Molly Barton as Katalin Hunyak dealt with the Hungarian convincingly. Together with the other girls, Lucy Wolford, Bianca Burduja, Misty Branch and Iris Komuhendo and - of course – Robyn – they all worked so well together in *Cell Block Tango*.

The other side of the “understudy” cast, is that those in “named” roles have to flow back into the ensemble seamlessly, which is a tough thing to do, but it was achieved really well. Much rehearsal, I’m sure, and testament to all your hard work and the skill of the Director and Choreographer.

Andrew Rogers
 London Regional Councillor