

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD

SHOWCASE FESTIVAL 2016/2017

ADJUDICATION

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Group | WITHAM AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY |
| Venue | WITHAM PUBLIC HALL |
| Date of Adjudication | 25TH OCTOBER 2017 |
| Production | 9 – 5 THE MUSICAL |
| Director | NIKKI MUNDELL-POOLE |
| Adjudicated by | DAWN KING AND CAROLINE FRITZ |

INTRODUCTION

The publicity campaigns in advance of this production, particularly those on social media came across very well, looked professional and were well thought-out. The programme was exceptionally well produced for an amateur group – clear, vibrant, easy to read and it was well priced.

FRONT OF HOUSE

Working in a very small space the front of house team were welcoming and well-organised. A very good display of photos gave a nice ‘taster’ of what to expect, the raffle well organised and the bar efficient and well stocked.

SETTING AND PROPS

There were many challenging items to set and strike, including desks and beds, and on the whole this was managed well, although sometimes the end effect needed a bit more scrutiny – Mr Hart’s office sofa looked rather scruffy and rumpled (although it was supposed to have seen a bit of action, one surmises!!) The furniture was suitably nondescript and allowed for the period feel to be created by the clever use of small period props, which in Act 2 also provided additional colour to the previously drab scenes.

On the subject of Hart’s office, it was a shame, although perhaps necessary to allow for scene changes behind cloths, that it was set so far upstage, and provided a very cramped space for the actors to move around in. There were some important moments in plot and character development that happened in this upstage area, and regrettably they always appeared awkward, and tended to slow the pace of the production.

The cloths themselves detracted from the overall feel of the production and slowed down the pace. They were quite a contrast to the very up to date use of lights and video.

MUSIC AND SOUND

The band were good, and had just the right style, really capturing the Country and Western style of show. The arrangements supported both solo and chorus numbers well. However, the sound was a little problematic on the evening that we attended. The sound balance between pit and performers made the vocalists hard to hear on occasion. Some lyrics were lost, and there were some late cues.

LIGHTING

Lighting was used very well, and added atmosphere and spectacle to many of the chorus numbers, as well as nicely pointing up the 'fantasy' scenes and the pot smoking scene. The video which comes with the production materials was a surprising, but presumably necessary part of the production. Technically it was cued very precisely with the action, and worked well at the adjudicated performance – always a potential challenge with technology!

COSTUMES

A good deal of effort had been put into creating the right look for the time period, including some excellent 1970's hairdos from the men!! The somewhat 'drab' brown and grey look of the office in the first half was contrasted well by the more upbeat and colourful transformation when the three ladies get their hands on the running of the company. Doralee too provided a welcome lift in her colourful ensembles. Violet's transformation was very well executed, into a lovely vibrant red trouser suit, and on a similar note, Judy's revenge fantasy provided a lovely opportunity for some glamour, and a lovely set of evening dresses for the ladies chorus

PERFORMANCE:

Judy (Matilda Bourne)

This was a nicely developed characterisation, with good contrast between her depressed, lacking confidence persona, to the stronger more independent woman in the second half. She carried this characterisation through musically into her very well-performed songs. Matilda also demonstrated good comic timing, and she was a very active listener – generating an energy on stage even when not speaking. Her second half song was a highlight of the show.

Violet (Diana Easton)

A very good performance, with some of the best lines in the show. The strength of Violet's character was pivotal to the whole production, and the audience had to like her and feel empathy with her. She achieved that very competently, - nice touches in the early scene

with her son, and showing her emotional vulnerability in the scenes with Joe. Nice comic approach too, in the hospital scene, and the pot smoking scene. Good projection overall.

Doralee (Sarah Miles)

Another good performance with very strong projection in the songs and good stage presence. Sarah avoided the 'over the top' trap this character could present to be consistent and authentic throughout. This was also true of her accent. There was a good shift from more naivety to outrage when she finds out about the rumours.

Franklin Hart Jnr (Niels Bradley)

A suitably sleazy performance! A lovely tone to his voice did not stop him from throwing himself fully into character in his songs (sometimes people over-sing when they have the voice to do so). His full commitment to the role is to be commended as he spent a large part of the second half swinging in a harness!

Ros (Rhianna Howard)

Another performer who totally committed to the role and used all her appearances on stage to add to her characterisation. It would have been very easy to take this character "over the top", and to become ridiculous, but Rhianna didn't let this happen, and so even though her part was comedy and stereotypical we retained a degree of sympathy for her. We particularly noted the way she kept character in the 5-9 number.

Joe (Danni Carr)

Lovely characterisation which really blossomed in Act 2. There was a super tone and quality to his voice and his second half song was well worth waiting for. Well done.

Josh (Ben Rolph)

Josh's nice portrayal of an awkward teenage son was spot on, and his relationship with mum Violet very recognisable. A little more work on projection will help Josh in his future roles.

Dick (Richard McNeill)

Well, we could all see why Judy wants rid of Dick! Richard gave a suitably laid back portrayal of the 'average' guy who thinks his (soon to be ex-)wife is still at his beck and call. He really looked the part, but again could develop his performance with a bit more projection.

Dwayne (Nik Graham)

Nik was a great partner to Sarah's Doralee – supportive and caring. Whilst needing a laid back persona to balance Doralee's vivacity, a little more 'oomph' in the characterisation would have given her more to play against. Although the accent was good, diction and volume was sometimes an issue.

Margaret (Emma Loring)

As the office 'lush' who transforms herself into super-smart and efficient inspired by the new female management team, Emma had a great cameo part. She had some lovely throw-away lines, but sometimes these were rushed, and again these could not always be heard in the part of the auditorium in which we were sitting. There is also a need not to overplay the drunken walk, as it turns very quickly into pantomime performance.

Tinsworthy (Tom Whelan)

A nice end-of show cameo from Tom, although we weren't quite sure about the costume choice.

Chorus /Dancing

The chorus numbers were well blocked, and had excellent attention to detail. I was particularly struck by the opening number, where each cast member had a different characterisation within the whole. Commendation must be given for the precision with which the ensemble moves were carried out – clearly a lot of work had gone in to making sure everyone knew exactly what they were doing, and it came across. Similarly, the vocals were sung with energy, although occasionally diction slipped.

The company is blessed to have some really good dancers, and the choreography for their numbers was well done, and well executed. I particularly liked the Dance of Death, and the way that movement styles were contrasted between pieces.

DIRECTION

The frequent cloth changes which punctuated the first half particularly tended to drain the energy created in previous scenes, and seemed inconsistent with the overall production values. This production lends itself to snappy action and a 'business-like' approach – it is set in an office, after all – and sometimes the number of people used in scenes made this appear unnatural and in contrast to the storyline– a busy office with lots of people doing very little for extended periods of time?

The use of whole stage, including upstage rostra and minimal set for Franklin's office then made it a very stark, not always comfortable contrast.

The scene where the girls smoke pot and then go on to fantasise about revenge was a production highlight, and really showed some pace and energy, as was the Act 2 scene between Violet and Joe.

WAOS and Nikki are to be congratulated for bringing yet another modern musical to North Essex, and giving the cast different experience, and audience the opportunity to see something new.

Dawn King/Caroline Fritz – 7th November 2017.