

WITHAM AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY, WITHAM

Betty Blue Eyes, book by Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman, music by George Stiles ,lyrics by Anthony Drewe.

**Director and Choreographer Claire Carr
Musical Director Susannah Edom
Assistant Director Emma Loring
Production Manager Paul Goddard**

Performed at Witham Public Hall on Thursday 28th April 2022

I was warmly welcomed at front of house and was able to talk with Director and Choreographer Claire Carr in the interval.

The society are celebrating their centenary year in 2022 and this production was a challenging choice to showcase their many talents. There was lots of humour and some rather eccentric characters, all maintaining their Yorkshire accents throughout !

The set, brilliantly designed by Claire Carr, Director, depicted a rather grey and austere town, including a shopping parade, in post war Yorkshire. There were multiple entrances and exits and a beautiful stained glass window at the back of the set. The changes in scenes were skilfully achieved by the use of a myriad of props including a pig sty!

The show opened with a rousing and colourful company number, "Fair Shares For All". Matt Bacon, as Gilbert Chilvers, the new mild mannered chiropodist in town, with his socially ambitious wife Joyce, played by Aimee Hart, were central characters to the plot. They were well paired, had excellent character interpretations and strong voices.

Mother Dear, superbly played by Fiona Bocking, was a dear, slightly "batty" old lady, hilarious in "Pig, No Pig" with Gilbert and Joyce.

Gilbert's lady patients, Mrs Roach (Amy Pryce), Mrs Lester (Megan Abbott) and Mrs Turnbull (Tracey Hackett) performed their roles really well in "Magic Fingers".

There was an impressive group of local dignitaries, all with fabulous voices, comprising Dr Swaby, played by Stewart Adkins, as the leader of the council, Henry Allardyce, an accountant, played by David Slater and Francis Lockwood, a solicitor, played by Dannii Carr. All excellent characters, played with enthusiasm and gravitas, trying to dominate the efforts of the town to celebrate the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip, small parts undertaken with great dignity by Megan Abbott and Steve Rogers.

The meat Inspector Wormold ,played with great skill and strength by Ian Gilbert, was a hybrid character , essentially quite evil and scheming, with pseudo Nazi and panto villain tendencies.

Two butchers, Nuttall, (Matt Waldie) and Metcalfe, (Richard Herring), were essential to the plot as was Sutcliffe, the farmer (Ben Rolfe) all played true to character. I must mention the butcher's wife, Mrs Metcalf (Maeve Borges) , trying hard to tempt the chiropodist with her "sexy" and lusty poses and Mrs Allardyce (Carole Hart) with daughter Veronica (Poppy Borges-Wilby) in tow, bringing additional humour to the show.

Of course, Betty the pig was really the star of the show, aided by her very skilful handler, Alison Mason.

I loved the "fantasy" transformation of Joyce, from chiropodist's wife into a glittering star. How did she manage the costume changes so seamlessly ? The ballroom scene was exquisite, with a beautiful backdrop and exuberant singing and energetic swing dancing to "Lionheart". Well done to all the dancers and ensemble members in the production, all very well rehearsed and co-ordinated.

Special congratulations to Musical Director, Susannah Edom, who, with the highly talented 8 piece band ,has provided excellent support and direction with sound levels exactly right. There was imaginative use of lighting, props and sound effects and Costumes Manager, Anne Howe did a great job ! A comprehensive creative and production team ensured the success of the show !

**Well done to Emma Loring, as Assistant Director and Paul Goddard, as Production Manager, for helping to bring the production together.
Most of all, many congratulations to Director and Choreographer Claire Carr for her imaginative and innovative approach to this scintillating production.
A first class evening, greatly appreciated and enjoyed by the audience.**

**Hazel Hole MBE
Regional Representative
NODA East**