

## Michael Gray's Arts Blog

9 TO 5

WAOS

at the Public Hall, Witham

24.10.2017

A nostalgic journey back to 1979, nicely suggested in Witham by shades of brown and beige, with splendid hair and moustaches for the men, the villains in this vaguely feminist fairy tale.

This is “the Dolly Parton musical”; not a juke box selection of her greatest hits, but the play what she wrote, nearly ten years ago now, based on the 1980 film in which she starred with Jane Fonda.

She stars in this too – as a virtual presence, a one-woman Greek chorus projected behind the action – and vicariously as the Backwoods Barbie “too much make-up, too much hair”, played for WAOS by Sarah Miles. A very enjoyable performance, matched by the three other principal ladies – Matilda Bourne’s Judy, the new kid on the office block, Diana Easton’s Violet, a fine comedy presence and a polished vocalist, and Rhianna Howard’s excellent Roz, who’s besotted with the MCP boss of Consolidated, Franklin Hart Jr [Niels Bradley]. Emma Loring is the “old lush” Missy, and Dannii Carr the noble accountant who finally finds happiness with Violet.

“Glitchy” was the word in the interval bar: cues missed, lines fumbled, a recalcitrant harness. The big production numbers – One of the Boys, Heart to Hart, with the chorus in the aisles – worked well, but too often the songs were left to work their magic on an empty stage. Nikki Mundell-Poole’s production has some fine dancing, and the fantasy sequences work well. James Tovey, the Musical Director, brings some so-so numbers to life – he has a convincing show-band in the Witham pit.

Had the show been done in the 70s – when the much missed Brigadoon was still thought a good night out – we could have expected similar tired cloths and wobbly flats. But no sound system pumping out the decibels, which might have resulted in a better band/vocal balance, allowing us to hear more of Ms Parton’s lyrics.