

DRAFT REPORT FOR THE MARCH 2000 EASTERN NEWS
PERFORMANCE OF 29TH OCTOBER 1999

WITHAM A.O.S. - CALAMITY JANE

This first time production for the company was directed and choreographed by Jacqui Foster. Given that there were really too few men in the chorus for the plot, ensemble scenes were well handled and presented with energy, and the dancers made an excellent contribution. The opening sequences captured the atmosphere of the town and anticipation of the stage's arrival well enough, but the build up was long through being started during the overture and as a consequence Calam's arrival seemed to lose impact. We also lost some initial dialogue explanations early on due to orchestra volume. There were some other similar occasions later, but on the whole M.D. Jill Parkin had things well under control. Costumes and sets were mostly fine, though why a stone cabin for Calam? The show was reasonably well lit, though, for me, the high lighting level in Black Hills did not really assist the number. Kathryn Adkins gave a spirited performance as Calam, but to my mind didn't achieve the raw dominance needing to be exhibited in Act I; she seemed much more comfortable in her Act II characterisation. Stewart Adkins' Bill Hickock was excellently strong in all departments. The main supporting principals, Jonathan Baron as Gilmore, Tim Clarke as Fryer and Elisabeth Ladd as Katie, all came across convincingly, with well defined characters. Support amongst the remaining principals was somewhat variable, with inexperience showing in places. The show kept up a good pace throughout, particularly in the ensemble 'argument' scenes, and the final curtain 'coach' tableau (in Halifax advert style) was extremely effective.

Overall this was a good evening's entertainment, and thoroughly enjoyed by a full house, though there was more comedy to be extracted from the secondary characters and their situations than emerged.

Other Comments (for the Society only)

1. The idea of populating an open stage with the cast is a useful way of focussing the audiences attention during the overture, and is being done more and more to counteract the rudeness of audiences in that period. However there is a drawback in some shows, and this is one in that the excitement leading up to the arrival of the stagecoach has to be maintained for much longer than the writing and scoring allows, and so the climax of Calam's entrance is inevitably at a lower key than it should be.
2. Sorry to mention Black Hills in disappointment terms, but, for me, this is a reflective number being sung by the light of lanterns. It started off well in the side aisles, and the canopies were good, but to light it so strongly and to beef up the tempo and volume once everyone was on stage was an interpretation that to me was at odds with the musical style and the lyrics of the piece.
3. A couple of points about making things obvious to the audience. (a) The notice in the bar in Act I about the singing star was surely too small for the customers (cast) to read, never mind the audience, and therefore did not keep in the audience's mind that this place was in fact a theatre as much as a saloon. (b) The audience reaction to Calam's entry into the cabin, after having fallen into the creek, was tentative and restrained, yet it could have been a shout of laughter, if Calam had looked more bedraggled, or more to the point, the dress had clear and obvious mud stains on it. Yes, I know they were there, but not instantly recognizable as such from afar.
4. I'm all in favour of the open stage whilst the audience assembles, but stage crew discipline is essential, and it was unfortunate that about 5 minutes before the orchestra came in a young member of the crew chose to peer round a curtain leg at stage left, wave to someone in the audience and then have a hurried mouthed conversation.
5. Another good programme, with plenty of interesting information.