

Guys & Dolls, CAODS,

Performed at the Civic Theatre, Chelmsford, February 27, 2015.

Director – Ray Jeffery, Musical Director – Patrick Tucker

I had forgotten what a busy show this is. When the curtains opened we were treated to a wonderfully stylized version of Broadway - colourful, brash, buzzing with life and excitement- and this continued throughout. It would have been hard to sustain the almost cartoon-like physical attitudes of the “Guys” in the early scenes, with their highly exaggerated movements but this set the tone for some of the best and most differentiated characterization of some of the smaller principals, particularly Benny Southstreet (David Gillett) and Harry the Horse (Tony Catchpole), that I had ever seen before in this show. Without this initial exaggeration the subsequent characterization may have seemed forced or just strange but as it happens it was both funny and clever. Of course, the other main Broadway regulars, particularly Nicely-Nicely (David Slater), Nathan Detroit (Kevin Richards) and Miss Adelaide (Robyn Gowers), also served up extremely good characterizations but they were lucky enough to have wonderful songs and sufficient dialogue to develop them. I loved the constant grazing of Nicely-Nicely, the hilarious relationship between Nathan and Adelaide and the consistency with which they maintained their bizarre engagement. All three were flawless in their delivery and timing.

The Broadway visitors, meaning Sarah Brown (Cassie Estall) and Skye Masterson (Ian Gilbert), represented a touch of theatrical sanity amidst the Broadway madness. Sarah was clearly portrayed as the beautiful yet untouchable ice queen but how quickly she thawed after a couple of Dulce de leches. Skye was atypical in some ways, not a classic high baritone and yet his character portrayal was spot on - smooth, quick-witted and charming. These two made a delightful couple that contrasted well with Mindy’s misfits.

The chorus was extremely strong and I have to praise the men in particular, for their dancing skills as much as their vocal strength. Both *The Oldest Established* and the *Crapshooters* scenes were especially good, the best I have seen a male chorus dance in a while. The Hot Box girls were great but I expected them to be. The biggest surprise was the riotous Havana number, which seemed to go on for a long time but was nevertheless entertaining throughout. The costumes were colourful and plentiful, providing variety and interest, while the attention to detail with accessories, such as shoes, flowers and smaller props was also very good. CAODS showed us why Guys & Dolls remains a musical theatre favorite.

Reviewer- Stewart Adkins
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