

Sister Act – CAODS

Performed at the Civic Theatre, Chelmsford, 22nd September 2015

Director – Sallie Warrington, Musical Director – Robert Wicks

CAODS' production of *Sister Act* was guaranteed to *Take Me To Heaven*, from the curtain up. There is no overture here so we are straight in to one of the best songs of the show and yet it is only in the reprise, with the nuns ensemble at the end of Act One, that we really appreciate it. The action moves breathlessly from Deloris' audition scene to her witnessing a murder, reporting it to the police and being hidden in the local cathedral. En route we meet Sweaty Eddy, the policeman with a crush on Deloris since schooldays and the caricature heavies, Curtis and his gang. We only get a hint of the fun to come from these guys before we meet Mother Superior and the full nuns chorus.

Helen Hedin is superb as the Mother Superior, steadfast, reliable, with a dry wit and an, oh, so wonderful voice that comes into its own in Act 2. John Cox as Monsignor O'Hara, brings a lightness of touch to this small role. The lead nuns, of which there are several, are wonderfully cast providing variety and fun at the same time. Stephanie Yorke-Edwards shines as the enthusiastic vocalist, Sister Mary-Patrick; Joyce Kramer-Cox provides grit and gravel as Sister Mary Lazarus, while Jessica Broad is a wonderful discovery as postulant Sister Mary Robert, combining innocence, curiosity and courage with a beautiful voice (especially in *The Life I Never Led*). As an ensemble the nuns are joyous to listen to and a pleasure to watch; the choreography is fun and accommodates everyone, not requiring specialist dancers.

Eddie, Deloris' latent love interest, is well played by Oli Budino. His characterization is sympathetic without being too down-trodden and his three costume trick during *I Could Be That Guy* was great. Jonathan Davis's Curtis is gruff and nasty with *When I Find My Baby* blending lovely vocals with surprisingly unpleasant lyrics. The three stooges, Joey, Pablo and TJ (played by Ian Gilbert, Ben Wilton and David Gillett) are funny during their brief dialogue scenes but laugh-out-loud hilarious during the sing and dance routine *Lady in the Long Black Dress*. These guys could not only dance but do so in a way that milked every ounce of fun from it. Finally, Deloris herself, played by Tessa Kennedy, brings a huge personality and a huge voice to this demanding role. Yet, in Act 2 when defending her Sisters from gunman Curtis, she is able to dial down and bring pathos and warmth to her character. This is a key role around which this whole show revolves and Ms Kennedy did not disappoint and can be summed up as *Fabulous Baby*.

Finally a word on the technicals. With twenty two scenes, several involving trucks to bring in and out behind front cloths or flats, this was never going to be easy. Yes there were a few minor delays that will speed up during the week but for a first night this was very well done. I loved all of the cathedral scenes but especially the stained glass windows and also the large hanging flats that represented the hallway, I believe. Costumes were spectacular in the finale and the prisoners' appearance was a nice touch. The balance between band and stage was good and overall this was a highly enjoyable production that deserves full houses.

Reviewer – Stewart Adkins
Regional representative – District 8
NODA East