

Sister Act - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre

(24th September)

Review by Cheryl Rogers

What a show! This musical was performed by CAODS with all the style and pizzazz that made it so popular when it was running in the West End, the audience in Chelmsford loved it. Set in the seventies the story tells of a larger than life nightclub singer who witnesses a murder committed by her gangster boyfriend and who is persuaded by the police to take refuge in a convent, where her identity is protected, to await the trial. There were lots of laughs, big blowsy numbers and excellent singing, the recipe for a humdinger of a show as long as there is a leading lady who can carry it off. The whole show pivots on this character, the diva herself, Deloris Van Cartier played here by Tessa Kennedy. What a major coup for the company to have found this girl to play their leading lady. Not only did she look the part with her statuesque physique, made even more impressive by platform soled, high heeled long boots, but her personality had all the flamboyance and exuberance to match. The icing on this particular cake however, was her magnificent voice that soared loud and confidently throughout song after song – stunning! Her performance was beautifully complemented by that of the Mother Superior, Helen Hedin, whose comic delivery was spot on and whose lovely voice did more than justice to her songs, she was every inch the character and a joy to watch. It was heartening to see so many talented female members of the company getting the chance to do some good character acting. Jessica Broad played the young postulant, Sister Mary Robert, with yet another delightful voice. Stephanie Yorke-Edwards gave a spirited and hugely funny performance full of enthusiasm, as Sister Mary Patrick and another good comedy actress, Joyce Kramer-Cox, got a lot of laughs in the part of Sister Mary Lazarus.

Then there were the nuns! What a great sounding ensemble of lively and energetic ladies they were. Their closeness and vitality was almost tangible and it was clear that they were enjoying every minute, which in turn made the audience feel included, this was a production that anyone would have loved to be part of. Then we come to the men in this musical, though few in number (unusually, this is a musical for a predominantly female cast) they made their mark and gave us some excellent moments. The villains of the piece were led by Jonathan Davis as Curtis, the gangster owner of the nightclub and erstwhile boyfriend of Deloris. He was well played with all the menace and nastiness befitting the character, whilst also delivering a fine rendition of his song. His three sidekicks, Joey, TJ and Pablo, played by Ian Gilbert, David Gillett and Ben Wilton, gave a hilarious parody of The Drifters (singing group in the 1950s) and made the most of the comedy in their ‘Lady in the Long Black Dress’ number. Oli Budino as Eddie, was the policeman and antihero, the uncool, nerdy protector of Deloris. His three costume changes during one dance number was admirable. There were other cameo roles, all fun and well performed, special mention to Paul Carr for his butch drag queen!

This show was bright, colourful and audience pleasing. Sallie Warrington, the director, delivered a great production and gave us all an evening to remember.

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards