

Annie Get Your Gun – CAODS
Performed in the Civic Theatre, Chelmsford, Sept 27, 2011.

Director – Ray Jeffery; Musical Director- Patrick Tucker

After a lonely start for Buffalo Bill, who appeared sans music for what must have appeared an age to him, the Prologue got under way in a dramatic style that set the tone for the rest of the piece. This was a play within a play that allowed the Director free rein to be creative with the transitions. The staccato, puppet-like movements into the scene, to be repeated at the end of Act 2, were both clever and interesting, as though the actors were winding up to perform. All the chorus entries, of which there were several more, I suspect, than were written, were impressive. Not only were they full of colour but full of variety of movement. It helped to have Indians, cowboys, show dancers, socialites and other types of character in the plot but to give them different choreography turned show business into spectacle. Additional touches like the “rifle drill” and the percussive use of rifle butts to add urgency and pace to parts of the dialogue were much appreciated. The wonderful sets added to the overall impression of a production with fine attention to detail.

The two main principals were exceptionally strong. Claire Carr’s Annie Oakley was an entirely convincing hillbilly complete with gurning features, bow legs and mangled American vowels. Her characterisation was possibly too stereotyped for some tastes but her consistency was very amusing and it made the “love” scenes with Frank all the funnier. This was a wonderful portrayal overall and both singing and acting were of a high order. Richard Harrison’s Frank had less to do but the partnership with Annie was superb. Harrison’s height and physical presence suited the character and his singing, always excellent, had a delightful timbre that I had not noticed in his previous roles. Kevin Richards’ Charlie Davenport had an energy and sharpness to his performance that drove the production forward and Elle Moreton’s Dolly could be relied upon to add some spice to a scene. The young lovers, Winnie and Tommy, were well matched for dancing and singing but had at least one song, I think, that I don’t remember from the pre-1999 production. The smaller roles were all strongly delivered, especially Annie’s Family Two.

Apart from some moments required to acclimatize the brain to the unusual accents the audibility was good, while the balance between band and company was always spot on. It may have helped audibility having the band at the back of the stage but it certainly helped visibility having the apron at the front, bringing the cast much closer than usual to the audience.

Congratulations CAODS for yet another artistic success. I do hope that you get good houses since the show deserves to be enjoyed by as many people as possible. The show may be sixty years old but this production was young and fresh.

Reviewer – Stewart Adkins
NODA Representative, NODA East
District 8