

**Annie - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (28<sup>th</sup> Feb)**

Review by Cheryl Rogers

It is good to report that the musical 'Annie' still retains all the charm that has made it so popular ever since the late seventies when it was first produced. This 'rags to riches' story of the cheeky orphan who stole the heart of the billionaire Oliver Warbucks, has the ingredients guaranteed to please an audience of all ages. Unforgettable songs, comic characters and lavish settings, all complete with a band of talented children and a dog!

There are two casts of children for this CAODS production but I can only comment on the cast I saw, although I imagine they are equally well chosen for their parts. The 'Annie' on this occasion was played by Millie Parsons, who comes from a family with generations of experience in treading the boards. It seems that she is going to follow in their footsteps if her performance was anything to go by. She was certainly up to the task of belting out 'Tomorrow' and all the well known numbers in time honoured 'Annie' tradition and coped with controlling the little dog, whilst still managing dialogue, with total confidence. She was unfazed by the adult talent surrounding her and obviously knew all her moves perfectly. The other children playing the orphanage kids were equally talented, knowing their dialogue well and performing the numbers with enthusiasm, especially little Annie Guy, as Mollie, who put her heart into it all, they looked as if they were having the time of their lives.

In charge of this ragged band, and played hilariously by the very experienced Kim Anderson, was Miss Hannigan. This is a superb part for any actress and Kim rose magnificently to the challenge, portraying the hard drinking orphanage supervisor with abandon, her dislike of her little charges being particularly emphasised in the song 'Little Girls' and drawing much laughter from the audience. Her sidekicks were Kevin Richards (Rooster) and Helen Meah (Lily St Regis) who made a good team. They played well together and Helen carried off the part of Lily, excellently. The rendition of 'Easy Street' by these three characters was a lot of fun and one of my favourite numbers. Richard Harrison was splendid in the role of Oliver Warbucks and once again turned in a faultless performance, this man can slip effortlessly into any character it would seem. Stage presence emanates from every inch of his impressive height and it is always a pleasure to watch him. Claire Carr as the elegant Grace Farrell looked divine, especially in the final scene, she is another valuable asset to this group.

Finally I must talk about those who played cameo roles (John Sullivan as President Roosevelt being especially enjoyable in this role) and indeed also the chorus. All contributed to this production without a single weak character, the chorus was as slick and beautifully costumed as we expect from this society. It was a fine family show.

In September CAODS presents 'Crazy For You' try to catch it if you can.

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards