

Annie – Chelmsford Amateur Operatic Society

Performed Thursday, Feb 28, 2013 at Civic Theatre, Chelmsford

Director – Ray Jeffery, Musical Director – Patrick Tucker

With a theatre full of parents, grandparents and other relatives of the youngsters on stage this was always going to be a commercial success with no shortage of goodwill from the audience. *Annie* is one of those shows that tugs at the heartstrings as soon as you see the orphans tucked up in their beds. Annie and the Orphans certainly didn't disappoint, with Annie as their tough, gutsy leader and Molly as the cutest thing on stage (even cuter than the dog!). Annie delivered a knowing performance with a belter of a voice, particularly at the higher end of the range. Her interaction with her fellow performers but particularly with Warbucks was both credible and heart-warming. All the Orphans performed really well with no problems of diction or audibility, despite an unfamiliar, US accent.

The Overture used the Company well, providing us with colour and interest throughout although there was no detectable "story" locating us in 1933 or in the depths of a depression. Nevertheless that became apparent with Hooverville in Scene 3 and the Warbucks dialogue in Scene 6. The Company was kept additionally busy as servants, politicians, radio studio extras and down and outs. Despite twelve scenes and as many scene changes the pace was good and the action continuous. The Warbucks mansion scenes were particularly impressive and the final scene, with snow falling outside and all the Christmas decorations visible inside, was excellent.

The adult principals were all very strong. Miss Hannigan had a wild look about her with her untamed red hair, constantly harassed, her bark worse than her bite, and yet giving the feeling that life had been unfair to her. This was an excellent performance marred only by an unsympathetic orchestra that was just too loud during the wonderful *Little Girls* number and also during *Easy Street* when all three singers struggled to be heard properly. The less brash numbers didn't seem to cause a problem. Oliver Warbucks began as cold and business-like and soon mellowed into warm and concerned but always strong, as he delivered songs as varied as *NYC* and *Something was Missing* with power and subtlety. Grace Farrell, despite having no songs of her own, was a consistently reassuring presence, attractive and supportive, dramatically and vocally.

Annie was a lively and fun production that, despite its reputation as a "youth production" on the amateur scene, offered a good mix of opportunities for young and mature performers alike and was certainly enjoyed by all audience members from five to eighty five years old.

Reviewer – Stewart Adkins
Regional Representative – District 8
NODA East