

Guys and Dolls - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (26th February) Review by Cheryl Rogers

Guys and Dolls is by no means a new show, it has been around since 1950 but has certainly stood the test of time. The humour has not lost its appeal and many of the songs are familiar, having become standards in their own right. There have been many London revivals since then as well as the film adaptation starring Frank Sinatra, Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons and Vivian Blaine. Most musical theatre lovers will have seen it at some time and it remains a firm favourite of many of us. For those who are not familiar with the story it tells of Nathan Detroit's attempt to set up a crap game (game of dice rolling) for all the big gamblers in town, unfortunately he needs to find \$1000 to secure a venue. Then we have Sarah Brown, a sister at the Save a Soul Mission who is struggling to find sinners and Sky Masterson who accepts a \$1000 bet from Nathan that he can't get her to go with him to Havana. Add in Miss Adelaide, who is desperate to marry Nathan after a 14 year engagement to him and the sparks fly.

This production was played in practically an American comic strip style, with vividly coloured, over the top costumes and over the top characters that were almost caricatures at times. The three gamblers who opened the show in their loud check suits and with synchronised moves, were played by John Sullivan, David Gillett and David Slater. They looked as if they were having a lot of fun and set the scene for the atmosphere of this production, I enjoyed watching this trio. Nathan Detroit, played by Kevin Richards, soon joined them and his larger than life character was the driving force in this performance. I enjoyed his portrayal of the rogue you can't help liking. Miss Adelaide, his fiancée, played by Robin Gowers, was well cast as the other half of this pair as they complemented each other perfectly in their interpretation of the roles. Unfortunately I failed to detect the same chemistry between the romantic leads, Cassie Estall as Sarah Brown and Ian Gilbert as Sky Masterson but really this is not something you can conjure up and it's a matter of good luck if it just happens. Cassie has a sweet voice and the Havana scene where she gets drunk was very well done, her singing of 'If I Were a Bell' was funny and clever, she kept up the difficult drunken behaviour right through the song whilst not overdoing it. Whilst on the subject of the Havana scene I must confess to disappointment that there was no change of scene from the New York set, no smoky atmosphere and the dancing just wasn't sexy enough for a Cuban bar, unusual for Ray Jeffery, the director, who normally does a steamy scene so well. I don't know what happened to the big fight that is supposed to break out towards the end of this very long scene but if it happened it wasn't obvious to me. The Hot Box girls certainly enjoyed being giggly and dizzy, their numbers were performed well. This show however, is all about the guys. Who doesn't like to see a troupe of men dancers in shirtsleeves and braces, rolling those dice? 'Luck Be A Lady' was well sung and performed by Ian, the male chorus accompanying him sounded excellent.

If I'm honest, the way this show was presented did not really 'do it' for me, some of the clever dialogue was lost because so many of the cast had been set with excessive comic characteristics and whilst I loved the silver sequin tailcoats of the finale costumes, I couldn't see how they were relevant to this show (would have been stunning in A Chorus Line!) I still enjoyed seeing this great show again but solely in my opinion, I couldn't say it set my world on fire.

CAODS next perform 'Sister Act' in September, a fine opportunity to catch a show that was in the West End until a few years ago. This should be right up their street.

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards

