

Copacabana – CAODS

Performed at Civic Theatre, Chelmsford on March 1, 2012

Director – Sally Warrington, MD – Stuart Woolner

For a songwriter who “writes the songs that make the whole world sing” Barry Manilow was a little less than generous in writing them into *Copacabana*, since only the title song and *Man Wanted* were familiar. Having said that the songs were enjoyable at the time but perhaps more for the performance and the atmosphere than the music per se. In fact this whole show is about the glamour of show business as well as its seedy flipside, the spectacle of a world that perhaps still exists in some of the ritzier capitals of the world – the world of the showgirl and the song-writer. In a plot that is an amalgam of *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, 42nd St and *Guys and Dolls* with sequins and feathers *Copacabana* manages to squeeze in more glamour than any show I’ve seen, including *Priscilla*. With a deceptively simple set, racks and racks of colour-coordinated costumes and props, combined with wonderful lighting here was a treat for the visual senses.

It helps of course that the cast and crew were so slick. The choreography was varied and fun, ranging from the hilarious hat trick in *Dancing Fool* to the big showgirl numbers such as *Havana/Ay Caramba*, *El Bravo* or the title song. And while I say the set was deceptively simple I was impressed with the way champagne bottles appeared from nowhere and how those big silvered flats moved in complete synchrony. To be honest I had a grin on my face for most of the show but that may have been, at least partly, on account of the legs on display. But I must not short change the principals, who were all strong. Steve Ames as Stephen/Tony had a fine voice and partnered well the delightful Cassie Estall who, as Samantha/Lola danced and sang equally well. Gareth Barton as Rico combined strong masculinity with a mixture of aggression and playfulness, the latter most obvious during the dance routines. His reluctant partner Conchita, very well characterized by Karen Kelleher, both vocally and in attitude, was a long way from being too old. Patrick Tucker played the old club owner with comic style, particularly during *Who am I kidding*, while Diana Baker is making the wise-cracking broad with a heart of gold her very own.

I loved the little extra touches such as the colour-matched coats and suit cases during the *Just Arrived* septet, the way the boys moved in *Dancing Fool*, the delightful show girls in *Who am I kidding* and the swinging camp Tarzan running gag during the *El Bravo Fanfare*. The band was excellent as we come to expect from CAODS and overall this was a thoroughly entertaining evening. I was surprised at how abruptly the show ended with curtain down at 21.45 but perhaps an early night is no bad thing. Congratulations to all.

Reviewed by Stewart Adkins, NODA East District 8