

GUYS AND DOLLS

CAODS at the Civic Theatre

24.02.15

Michael Gray.



The low-lifes steal the show in Ray Jeffery's hugely enjoyable, perfectly paced *Guys and Dolls*.

The set is a faded Picture Post New York, with the Hot Box Tardis shoe-horned between the fire-hydrants and the news-stands. But the Damon Runyon denizens of the devil's own city are wonderfully colourful: Harry the Horse [Tony Catchpole] in a splendid check suit, hyperactive Benny Southstreet [David Gillett] spivvy Nathan Detroit [Kevin Richards in a terrible toupée] and a florid Nicely Nicely from the excellent David Slater, who also gets to gatecrash the Havana party as a stylish roué.

The male chorus from Blossom Time have the lion's share of the hoofing, with some challenging choreography impressively executed – those two-tone crap-game shoes. The love interest is provided by Cassie Estall's Sarah with the 100% eyes and Ian Gilbert, cast against type as Sky, but bringing an engaging innocence and a quizzical, compelling stage presence to the role.

Nathan has dame trouble of his own, in the exemplary Adelaide of Robyn Gowers – a flawless performance from the nasal tones to the strategically placed kitchen shower. A stylish show, with Bette Davis centre stage, cigarette holders, and silver lamé for the wedding. Musically polished, too, with Patrick Tucker's band on fine period form in, for instance, the backing for *If I Were A Bell*.

And the death throes of vaudeville are neatly captured, in the gorgeous Hot Box Girls, and in the delicious double act of Benny and Nicely for the title number.

production photograph by Christopher Yorke-Edwards