

**Sweeney Todd - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (1<sup>st</sup> March)**

Review by Cheryl Rogers

Stephen Sondheim's music is not always the easiest to sing or even to listen to and any amateur company that decides to take on this challenge is brave. So, here we find CAODS going all out to put on this show, despite their rehearsal time being drastically reduced, performance dates being a month earlier than usual. Brave indeed!

Sweeney Todd is a difficult musical for many people to enjoy; you hardly come out humming the tunes! In fact discordant is a more appropriate description of much of the music, but when it comes to the story it's a different matter. A thriller built around the famous legend of Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, it is full of drama, comedy, thrills and special effects. This production had them all; from the blood chilling cut throat razor and the barber's chair that cleverly released the bodies of victims into the cellar below, to the smoking oven and the moving walkways that constantly changed the scene.

For me though, the strength of this production was in the performances, none better than Diana Baker playing Mrs Lovett, Todd's partner in crime. This was a fine portrayal of the character, beautifully acted and totally believable. Diana is an excellent comedienne and struck exactly the right balance between evil and comedy. However callous and evil Mrs Lovett behaved, you just couldn't help laughing at her! A complete bonus was that Diana could hit all the right notes, coping with the difficult score as if it was written for her. Truly a star performance and a part to die for – literally as it turned out for the unfortunate Mrs Lovett! Sweeney Todd, played by Rob Wilson, looked maniacal with a wild eye and a crazy laugh, he obviously relished playing this role. James Hearn (Anthony Hope) has a rich voice and a good stage presence, his love song to Johanna was beautifully sung. Another favourite of mine was the old beggar woman, a revolting, unsavoury character who was central to the plot and played by Angela Broad. Special praise must also go to Jimmy Hooper, taking the part of the simple minded Tobias. A talented actor, Jimmy interpreted this character so well, not making the mistake of overplaying the role and thus creating a boy you were hoping would have a happy ending, I'll leave it there not give away too much for those of you who might see this musical one day in the future.

I have to admit that I did not like the music in this particular Sondheim musical but enjoyed everything else! It was a great pity that this show did not have the audiences it deserved, Chelmsford theatre goers who gave this one a miss should have given it a try, it was unusual and well worth seeing.