

Kipps, the new Half a Sixpence Musical, CAODS – Civic Theatre, Chelmsford

TheatreLife

This was the first time we had seen this show live, as we had seen it on television over Christmas and although we know both its previous versions very well, we were looking forward to seeing it in a live theatre environment.

The set was very clever with sliding panels which allowed different centre sections depicting a variety of locations throughout the show and a large backdrop showing Folkestone pier/seafront. Some of the changes were very slow and noisy but this was opening night and we must remember whilst the cast have had months to rehearse the stage crew only see the set and work with it a couple of times before opening night, so I am confident this will improve with each performance.

Taking on the title role of Kipps was Tom Harper-Gray. Tom had a charm and personality which effervesced, and he carried the show with an ease of performance which was a joy to watch. He was ably countered by Joanne Quinney as his first love interest Ann. I really like the 3 shop boys – Sid, Pearce and Buggins played by Michael Bardo, Kieran Bacon and Jimmy Hooper respectively. They each had great characterisations and showed strong stage craft throughout. The lone shop girl, Flo was played by Charlotte Broad.

Jonathan Davis took on the part of the playwright and Actor, Chitterlow. This is one of the best things I have seen Jonathan tackle, with a feeling of Rik Mayall in his look and delivery, and great energy in all his scenes.

On the opposite end of the social spectrum playing Kipps second love interest, Helen Walsingham was Katie Doran. Katie was one of the strongest performers on the stage with excellent stage technique and an elegance and grace which not only made her stunning to look at but gave us a lovely insight into Helen's plight.

Her mother, the formidable Mrs Walsingham was played by Diana Easton. Diana clearly relished this role as the domineering and snobbish lady about town and worked particularly well with the devilishly wicked, Ian Gilbert as her son, the fraudulent James Walsingham. Ian again showed great stage craft in this part.

Making up the social elite in Folkstone was Roby Gowers as Lady Plunkett. It felt like that this part was written especially for Robyn, she excelled in her sneering look and command of the stage. Bringing some fantastic comedic moments whenever she was on stage.

The only downside for us last night was the sound balance was quite poor, we struggled to hear many cast members over a very heavily amplified orchestra which was a shame but again this is something that hopefully may improve over the run.

The show, as a whole, was a spectacle to watch, and it was clear Director, Claire Carr had put a lot of time and effort into all the company numbers where her choreography always excels.

If you can get a ticket to see the show, it is certainly worth seeing it as you are guaranteed a great evenings entertainment as it certainly put a smile o our faces and those around us.

Tickets available from the Civic Theatre, Chelmsford.