

Chelmsford Amateur Operatic & Dramatic Society

Kiss Me Kate

Director – Claire Carr

Choreographer– Claire Carr

Musical Director– Clare Penfold

Performed at The Chelmsford Theatre on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Reps name Victoria Carey

Reps district 8

NODA East

“Kiss Me Kate” is a show I know well and CAODS have a reputation for producing amateur musical theatre at a professional level so for these reasons my expectations were high. I am pleased to report that I was not disappointed.

Opening nights usually come with a few hiccups and this was no exception. I did note some missed entrances, a couple of scene changes that could have been a little smoother, a few fluffed lines and some individual vocals that didn't quite hit the mark. But all credit to this talented group, it did not detract from the incredible energy that each and every performer brought to the stage to give the audience an evening of wonderful entertainment.

As Kiss Me Kate is a “show within a show” a lot is expected from the principal cast as they are performing dual roles. Particularly when you are throwing Shakespeare into the mix! It is important that the audience understand the intent of the Shakespearean dialogue which in this musical is continually underlined with comedy. If the Actors don't deliver the dialogue correctly the comedy would be missed and this show would fall flat.

It did not.

I think what I enjoyed so much about this production was not just seeing a stellar cast of principal players but recognising there were so many members in the ensemble that gave as much as if they were the lead. I wish I could mention you all.

Nicola Harrington-Smith was well cast as feisty Lilli/Kate. Her vocals were perfectly suited for the role and her rendition of “I Hate Men” was very well done. I loved her dialogue through clenched teeth for the most part but at times it did mean

we couldn't always fully understand everything she was saying. But no doubt Nicola is a talented Actress with a superb voice.

Gareth Barton as Fred/Petrucchio probably had the trickiest job of all with so much complex dialogue. But he clearly understood the role, giving the audience a real dilemma on who they should root for... Fred or Lilli? His solo work was lovely, particularly his songs "Were Thine That Special Face" and the reprise of "So in Love". He absolutely had the charisma this role calls for and a stage presence that can't be taught.

Katie Doran (Bianca/Lois) gave us a Marilyn Monroe style performance with her song "Always True To You in My Fashion" being one of the stand out numbers of the night. She was well supported by Kieran Bacon as Bill/Lucentio who showed off his tap skills to good effect.

All of the supporting cast gave great performances with a special mention to Diana Easton as Hattie leading the company in the rousing opening number and to Andrew Harding as Paul for his work in the spectacular "Too Darn Hot". David Everest-Ring and Michael Bardo should also be commended on a slick presentation of the much loved "Brush Up Your Shakespeare". However, I would have liked to see them have a little more fun with this number but they deserved their encores.

Throughout this production it was evident that MD Clare Penfold had worked hard with the cast to produce some lovely harmonies which I always appreciate – "Cantiamo D'Amore being another highlight. The male harmonies in "I've Come to Wive it Wealthily in Padua" were also very strong.

Director and Choreographer Claire Carr should be applauded for the exceptional dance numbers, some of the best I have seen on an amateur stage. My guest and I both agreed we did not see a step or hand out of place and particularly liked the fan dance during "Were Thine That Special Face". If I were being really picky perhaps some of the dance breaks could have been cut a little shorter, particularly in the first Act which is notoriously long. I also have an issue with the number "From This Moment On" as I really don't feel it adds anything to the show. Not the fault of the performers, it just doesn't work in any of the productions of Kiss Me Kate I have seen. Having said this the energy levels from the cast were so high the audience didn't seem to mind how lengthy some of the numbers were and the pace ticked along nicely for the most part.

This really was a production of the highest quality with professional sets, lovely costumes, clever lighting and well balanced sound. Everyone involved both on and off stage should be extremely proud of their achievements. It was a privilege to be able to watch and I know many of the audience enjoyed it so much they

have booked to see it again, me included. It will be interesting to see if the opening night hiccups have been ironed out!

Finally, I would like to say thank you to the lovely front of house team for the warm welcome my guest and I received and to the Cast and Creative team for producing such a fantastic evening of entertainment. I very much look forward to seeing what CAODS do next.

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