

The Wedding Singer

CAODS

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> Centre, Chelmsford Theatre

Director/Choreographer – Sallie Warrington

Musical Director – Clare Benson

I always have high hopes going to see a CAODS production. This group has a reputation for putting on shows of a high standard and once again they have done it with The Wedding Singer.

This production was in very safe hands with Director/Choreographer Sallie Warrington at the helm. With Sallie in charge the dance numbers are always guaranteed to be slick and energetic. Matching the choreography for energy and precision were some superb vocals throughout the show, with tight harmonies that did not falter during the big dance numbers thanks to the excellent leadership of Musical Director Clare Benson.

There were many stand out performances throughout the night, too many to mention sadly and I include here some excellent cameo roles from the ensemble. But special mention must of course go to the leading couple Michael Bardo as Robbie Hart and Lauren Byford as Julia. Both had stunning vocals with Michael displaying a multitude of singing styles that thrilled the audience. From ballad to cheesy 80's pop to full out rock, he nailed them all. Michael delivered his dialogue with ease and had good comic timing when called for. Lauren's portrayal of Julia was heartfelt, sincere and extremely likeable. She instantly endeared herself to the audience. Their duet "If I Told You" was beautifully executed. I cannot believe this was Lauren's first principal role and have no doubt it will be the first of many.

Supporting them perfectly were Wylie Queenan as Sammy, Joe Baker (complete with killer vocals) as George and Cassie Estall as Holly. All three had very clear characters, great stage presence and sang well. Cassie in particular showed what a triple threat she is during her numbers.

One of the highlights of the evening, and I think I speak for the entire audience here, came from the wonderful Diana Easton as Rosie. Her rendition of "A Note From Grandma" was comedy gold. I loved the way she was able to be a sweet, loving grandma and a naughty, potty mouthed one all at once. Her rapping with Joe in "Move That Thang" was brilliant.

I really enjoyed the number “All About the Green” led by Kieran Bacon as the suitably vile Glen. I felt the use of the projector was particularly effective here with the dollar bills falling behind the cast and the choreography was very bravely executed on small tables that would have worried a lot of dancers.

Jo Quinney looked sensational as Robbie’s ex Linda and she should be applauded for carrying on so professionally when the sound dropped out during her scene. We could still hear her clearly and the technical fault was thankfully rectified by the theatre staff. Completing the principal line up, Caroline Escott as Angie, Julia’s Mum had a nice moment with Julia in her wedding dress.

Dancers and ensemble were as always well rehearsed and sang beautifully and there were some clearly defined characters that really stood out. I have to mention Hayden Wagland here who took on several cameos with each being funnier than the next. He also threw himself in to the dance numbers.

My only critique regarding performance is that many of the principals didn’t quite have consistency in their accents. For the most part American accents were evident but they did seem to slip at times. Either back to an English accent or change to different types of American accent. Only a small thing but worth mentioning as at times it did affect the impact of some of the dialogue.

Set design was simple yet effective with vibrant lighting in keeping with the era. A couple of follow spots were mis - timed but these things happen. The bed especially was excellent and as mentioned previously the use of the projector was effective. If I were being really picky I would have liked to see the projection fill the back wall more and reach down to the stage floor itself for further impact. But perhaps this was not possible. I liked the mirrors being flown down for “Pop!” and the light boxes on both sides of the stage looked great. The car in Act 1 sadly couldn’t really be seen, perhaps down to it’s colour so from where we were sat it did look a little like a cardboard box and didn’t match the standard of the rest of the props. Having said that I hugely appreciate that everything was made by members and friends of the society. Clearly a massive amount of work had gone into the visuals.

Costumes and make up were good on the whole although some of the wigs were a little distracting. But to be fair the 80’s look isn’t an easy one to pull off!

Sound was ok for the most part, a few late microphone cues and the technical hitch which meant the performance had to be stopped was a shame. But the issue was quickly rectified, and the Cast carried on in a very professional manner and did not let this hiccup effect their performance. The sound balance was otherwise good with the excellent band never overpowering the vocals. Scene changes were slick with minimal black outs which always aids the flow of a production.

The Wedding Singer is a good show with lots of laughs. Personally I don't think it has a very memorable score with the exception of a few numbers and in less skilled hands this show could possibly fall a little flat. But this talented Cast and creative team were able to bring the 80's to life with a vibrancy and energy which made for a very enjoyable evening.

Thank you to everyone involved for a wonderful evening of entertainment and to the lovely front of house team who always make me feel so welcome.

Victoria Carey

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