

Guys and Dolls

Date

13th April 2018

Society - Mid-Cheshire Musical Theatre Company

Venue - The Grange Theatre, Hartford

Type of Production - Musical

Director - Gary Jones

Musical Director - Marilyn Blank

Choreographer - Lorraine Callan

Report - **Author: Joe Clarke**

Mid Cheshire Musical Theatre Company put on their rendition of the 'classic', Guys and Dolls at the Grange Theatre, Hartford. Guys and Dolls tells the story of gambler, Nathan Detroit, and his quest to find a venue for a craps game, whilst keeping his romantic partner (desperate to be married) hanging on a thread. During this, he bets fellow gambler, Sky Masterson, that he cannot take the straight-laced missionary Sarah Brown on a trip to Havana.

Guys and Dolls was directed by Gary Jones. All actors were clear in the directions and intentions. Direction was good overall. Gary used both the main stage and the area in front of the curtain as performance areas. Whilst this worked in the main, at times, it was obvious that this was to aid scene changes, not to further the plot. However, due to the size of the space in the Grange Theatre, I cannot really see how this could be done otherwise.

Choreography was by Lorraine Callan. The choreography was appropriate for the time period and reflective of the style of this piece. At times, I felt that some of the dancers were marking through the choreography instead of performing it. One of my favourite numbers in the show is 'Luck be A Lady'. I was hoping to see the male cast show off their dancing skills but was a little disappointed that the female dancers appeared in the sewers whilst the men took a back seat. I understand why this decision was made from a directorial point of view - it was a great idea to have them as a metaphor of 'Lady Luck', dressed as different spots of the dice.

Marilyn Blank took the helm as Musical Director. Marilyn was fully in control of the ten-piece orchestra and helped bring in the actors when needed. I felt that some of the numbers could've been slightly more up-tempo to increase the energy onstage, particularly during some of the company numbers but this is only a personal preference. The orchestra sounded great. The set for this piece was average, yet appropriate. Whilst it was clear that the front curtain was closed to aid the scene changes, I did not hear and noise backstage at all. This was done seamlessly. The bright and colourful set, reflected the bright and colourful costumes.

Lighting was good. Some of the actors needed to find their follow spots from time to time but lighting was used nicely throughout this piece. I enjoyed the use of the led display lights in the auditorium during some of the numbers.

Sound was by Jonny Houghton. For me, there were no sound issues apart from the few actors who did not have a microphone on. The mix between the actors and the orchestra was very good and I could hear all of the action appropriately.

The costumes were a visual delight! I particularly liked the garish and brightly coloured suits worn by the gamblers. They matched the colourful set and looked well on stage. All of the costumes were reflective of the time period and appropriate to this piece.

Nathan Detroit was played brilliantly by Andy Chase. Andy had good stage presence and good presence of an increasing panic; trying to organise a crap game, hide from the law and keep his relationship going. I enjoyed Andy's partnership with Adelaide – they had good chemistry and good comic timing.

Miss Adelaide, played by Julie Gaskell, was also brilliant. She played her character with a vulnerability and shrillness that was appropriate and pleasing to watch. I liked Julie's interpretation of this role and thought that she commanded her scenes with a great energy. Julie was a delight to watch!

Sky Masterson was portrayed by Ben Obeid-Findley. Ben had a lovely singing voice and did well to tell the story of his character. He looked slightly too young for the part, but this is not a reflection on his interpretation of the role. Ben had a good stage presence, but I felt that he could've been stronger in showing the suave, comedic and commandeering side to his character.

Sarah Brown was played by Ellen Smith. For me, Ellen's interpretation of this role was a little too contemporary. Whilst she has a lovely singing voice, particularly her lower register, I felt that she might have been more suited to an earthier part, such as Miss Adelaide. Ellen's voice is lovely; she hit every note in her upper register, but it was not as strong and supported as her lower register – I suspect that she is an alto, singing a soprano part? The audience really liked her character so maybe this is just my own thinking?

Tony Rostron played the role of Nicely-Nicely Johnson great comic timing and had a great stage presence. I really enjoyed his interpretation of the role and I loved the energy that he brought to every scene. Tony has a good vocal range – 'Sit Down You're Rockin' The Boat' was great to watch and listen too – well done!

All of the other characters were played well. I particularly enjoyed the physicality and stage presence from Sid Robbins (Big Julie), the stage energy from Stuart Dutton (Benny Southstreet) and Bradley Smith (Harry the Horse) and the lovely interpretation of the role of Arvide Abernathy (Ian David).

Overall, there were a few hiccups with dialogue from a few of the main cast and a lack of energy and commitment from some of the dancers. However, the audience really enjoyed this performance so maybe I'm being a little picky? The warm welcome from this company was second to none. I felt at ease and very welcomed from Sue Chatt who couldn't do enough for me and my guest, as well as the mayor who was in attendance. It was clear that there is a lot of love for theatre within this society and a lot of community spirit. I cannot wait to return to support them and I wish them very well for their next production of 'Honk' in September.