

Sister Act- Mid-Cheshire Musical Theatre Company

4th November – Grange Theatre

Director – Vicky Dilworth

Musical Director – Barry Dilworth

Choreographer – Joanna Milborne

A fantastically fun, super energised and slick production was presented by Mid-Cheshire Musical Theatre Company. From the very start of the overture it was entirely clear that this was going to be a great performance.

The entrance of the church clergy into the auditorium requesting the parishioners (the audience) to be on their feet for service, set up the opening scene nicely, the famous words of Mother Superior “where oh where is our saviour?”, perfectly queued the unveiling of the stage, where we find Deloris Van Cartier and her backing vocalists Michelle and Tina auditioning for a spot in Curtis’s club. The backing vocalists added much more to this scene, using great characterisations throughout. Their vocals were also spot-on.

Vicky Dilworth approached this show with much consideration for the script, it certainly gave the impression that the cast had explored every detail of their character and their script. The variety of characters developed on stage were vast and very well executed, thus making this an excellent production for those watching. Clever inclusions such as the alter-boys smoking weed, the double on-stage costume reveal for Eddie in “I could be that Guy”, (the homeless people in this scene was genius), and the use of the auditorium for “chase scenes”, were just a few of the excellent decisions made by this director. The production was so slick with a very professional feel coming from the stage, all the elements worked seamlessly together.

Barry Dilworth, offered a very confident band with perfect balance throughout. The underscore sections were perfect, which is sometimes an issue with a band of this size. What was most striking was the quality of vocals coming from the stage, the harmonies were great and the sound the cast produced was hair raising. A special mention needs to go to the performance achieved in “When I find my baby” and “Lady in the long Black Dress”, both were excellent. Other standout moments for the harmonies were “simply divine” were “Raise your voice” and “Sunday Morning Fever”.

Choreographer, Joana Milborne, has such a great ability to create something memorable in her work and this production was no different. High energy routines for the nuns and smooth seductive moves for numbers such as “Lady in long black dress”. Joanna certainly took advantage of having some great men on hand, it was a great addition to have the alter-boys included in “Sunday morning fever”, this brought more comedy to the piece.

Deloris Van Cartier, was brilliantly played by Aimee Clare, bringing lots of sass and attitude to the role. Her portrayal of the “wanna be nightclub singer” was great with a stunning vocal. So many wonderful moments came from this lady, her comedic timing in scenes with Mother Superior, the more heartfelt moments in “Spotlight”, really displayed what a fine actress was onstage. A pleasure to watch.

Mother Superior brought to life by Debbie Allen, another great performance from this lady. She perfectly balanced the coldness and comedy required in this role. Wonderful use of facial

expressions throughout coupled with a very good vocal ensured that we got the most intense performance. A most talented actress.

Eddie Souther "Sweaty Eddie" perfectly portrayed by Andrew March. I just loved this character and it was much more developed in this production. The vocal was soft and gentle with a real smoothness, he really displayed what a great performer he is in the number "I could be that Guy".

Ivor Farley played the nasty, double timing gangster Curtis very well. His delivery of "When I find my baby" was great with lots of suggestive comedy throughout. Working well with his sidekicks, he offered some great comedic moments in this production.

Joey, TJ & Pablo played by Stuart Dutton, Jacob Hallet & Evan Johnson, I must speak about these men as a trio as they worked flawlessly together, I felt as if I were watching a well-oiled comedic act. Excellently developed roles which were a definite audience pleaser. Their harmonies and movement were simply perfect.

Neeve Dilworth a beautiful portrayal of Sister Mary Robert. A girl so young commanded the stage in such a confident manner offering a very good performance throughout. Starting meek and quiet, almost unnoticed she gave her character lots of room for growth. An explosive delivery of "The life I never knew" left no doubt that this lady is the real deal.

Sister Mary Patrick, Sophie Congleton lifted the rafters and played the very happy, cheery role very well. The direction of this character was perfect particularly the "sulking around corners" scenes which she excelled in the comedic value of the role. She created good chemistry with the other nuns also.

Sister Mary Lazarus, Jacqui Burgess was the perfect casting choice for this role. She brought some great comedy to her character, using every opportunity the script presented, her rap was spot-on.

Sister Mary Martin of Tours, Di Hurst was simply hilarious. Her outbursts mid scenes added a good deal to the show and offered variety within the nuns as a group.

Sister Mary Theresa, Meg Steward, I loved this character, she played it with much wit and blunt delivery, which was a great interpretation of the role.

Monsignor O'Hara, Jeff Burgess, firstly, I am so pleased that the director stuck with the Irish accent for this role, the accent was stereo-typical of an Irish accent, Jeff pulled it off very well. A fine character actor, I loved the delivery of the script, your approach made this role very memorable.

The ensemble which made up all the other required parts (the nuns, prostitutes, alter-boys, police, homeless), worked hard to deliver a first-class performance. The character work produced was excellent. The nun's chorus had lots of energy, vibrancy and character, it was impossible not to smile while watching them. A special mention must go to the two alter-boys (men), they were hilarious, and they honestly added a good deal more to this production. Funniest interpretation I have seen. Well done guys.

Sound, having been to this venue in the past the sound quality has never been as good as it should be, but on this occasion the sound was very acceptable. The balance between band and stage was very good.

Lighting plot was ambitious and difficult with some lovely touches added by the director. It was a great experience to watch, as all lighting cues were on time. Lovely isolated spots added to the overall effect of the scenes, "Spotlight" was beautiful. A great execution.

The visual of the production offered a great set design, simple but very effective. Stain glass windows in the shape of half arches lined the stage front to back on both sides, furniture moved in and out at great ease and at no time were we waiting for a scene change to happen. The use of the auditorium and the balcony certainly brought the action to the audience. Costumes and wigs were fabulous. The nuns had all the glamour required in "Take me to Heaven" and "Sunday Morning Fever", Deloris had the most stunning White dress and fur for the finale, her wig was also excellent. As mentioned previously one of the more fantastic costumes must be "Sweaty Eddie's" on-stage changes, these were excellent and the audience's reaction was so deserved. The boys were suitably provided with Silver Platform shoes which again added to the overall high standard of this production. The attention to detail was well appreciated.

Overall, this production was cast perfectly, it was slick and professional. Nothing was overlooked by the team and it certainly paid off on this occasion. I thoroughly enjoyed this show and left dancing. I look forward to my return visit in the New Year.

Best Wishes.

Louise Colohan