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Society : Panda Players  
Production : Sweet Charity  
Date : 7 March 2024  
Venue : Elgiva Theatre, Chesham  
Report by : Judith Watsham

Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to report on this production and for Pam Peel's warm welcome and hospitality to our NODA National President and myself and also for allowing us up on stage afterwards so that she could get a photograph with the cast for her collection in her Presidential Year – she has, I know, posted it on her blog for all to see.

This was a signed performance, and I must congratulate Wednesday Jones who worked tirelessly at the side of the stage in this capacity.

Amber Dye's direction and choreography was, as ever, excellent. I had never seen a man included in the song and dance numbers in the Fandango Club before which made your production a tad different.

Charlotte Medlar, your MD, put you all through your paces well and the small band kept the momentum going well on the whole – something faltered a little in *I'm a Brass Band* at one point, but everyone involved in this number, whether in the pit or on stage, made a good recovery!

With over a dozen different scenes I think your solution worked well with good use of both drops, with a few props added, for some scenes. This gave your SM, David J Martin, and his team a lot of work which was carried out seamlessly. I had been told that a few techie issues reared their head at the previous performance but to me, at least, the Thursday night ran successfully. Particularly inventive was the use of a slide from stage to orchestra pit to represent Charity's descent into the lake. The Coney Island ride worked very well too as did the lift.

Props were heavily featured throughout and Martin Beard and Chrissie Evans between them had obviously worked very hard to make this element successful.

Sound (Roger Knight and R-J Samme) and Light (Isaac Roitt) all worked well and the latter provided just enough illumination in the Coney Island scene to enable the cast to make good use of the auditorium. On the sound front I liked the muted chatter – presumably coming from customers in the Fandango Ballroom – when three protagonists were in the Hostess Room – this worked well, never overwhelming Charity, Nickie and Helene and their dialogue.

The make up and wig teams under Nikky Meeson did a good job – especially with Charity's red wig which looked very real.

The programme, under the banner of your Stage Manager's *martiarts design*, was very colourful with some excellent photographs and as I had seen some posters for the show I would like to suggest that you enter both for the NODA London Poster and Programme Awards for 2024; this is the only section of the London Awards which runs for a calendar year as opposed to the playing year from 1<sup>st</sup> April to the following 31<sup>st</sup> March; results at the 2025 London AGM and Gala. They can be submitted at any time, details on the NODA London website.

The wardrobe team, as always, also worked incredibly hard to put together all the costumes, especially as all the ensemble had named roles – many of you playing 3 or 4 different parts requiring different outfits. All the costumes, both principal and ensemble, were believably in period too.

The entire ensemble also worked incredibly hard, whether as named individuals or as a chorus. Everyone was completely in character all the time and your singing was excellent. The dancers, whether soloists like Sophie Dell in the Pompeii Club or the teams of Fandango Hostesses and Frug Dancers, added greatly to the entire storyline. Some good adlibbing when using the auditorium during the Coney Island scene.

Now to the Principal Roles:

Joanne Day really WAS Charity Hope Valentine. Jo, this was really a marathon! On stage nearly all the time, with many of the best known musical numbers, your accent, whether spoken or sung, was always spot on and you maintained, and projected, this naïve, innocent, yet hopeful, character so very well. The audience could really empathise and believe in you. Very well played. Your rather impish sense of comedy was evident, especially in the scene in Vittorio's apartment when you were shut in the wardrobe; you never upstaged the rather dramatic lovers' reconciliation either.

Film star Vittorio Vidal was well played by Robert Dadomo. An excellent accent Robert, very believable as the character too.

Cassie Winter was excellent in the part of Ursula March, emotional and dramatic, as the mistress – a well judged performance.

Marion Raeburn-James and Alison Ruffell played the parts of two of Charity's fellow Hostesses very well. Marion gave us a cynical, world-weary Nickie and Alison a disillusioned Helene. Your rendition of *Baby Dream Your Dream* was excellent with some very good harmonies.

Trish Lewis as the Fandango's owner Ermine also had a very good accent, stance and attitude which made her playing of the role totally believable.

Russell Stratton as the rather hung up and shy Osca Lindquist gave another excellent performance – again you, like the other principals, maintained your accent and character both in your dialogue and the musical numbers very well.

Kevin Vaughan-Smith was commanding as Daddy Brubeck in *Rhythm of Life*, putting the number over well as well as singing it with the necessary verve and enthusiasm; however, I have seen this scene played with the hippy adherents expending a lot more hysterical energy to fit the words!

The Pandas always put on a good show and *Sweet Charity* was no exception; judging from the audience's enthusiastic reaction (not to mention overheard comments) this one can be marked down as another successful show which I, for one, certainly enjoyed.

I see from the programme that you are to break new ground after over thirty years and venturing into drama in June. I do hope this is successful and that you keep it up, there are many keen performers out there who can act but not sing and you may well attract new members with this venture. Do, please, invite me along, especially as NODA gets a mention, albeit adverse! Personally, I have never specified which seats I prefer but I have seen few plays in this NODA performance year and would love to add the Pandas to my list of societies who perform both musicals and plays.

*Judith Watsham*

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