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Society : Panda Players
Production : Forbidden Broadway's Greatest Hits
Date : 6 July 2017
Venue : Hyde Heath Village Hall
Report by : Judith Watsham

Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to report on your latest production and for the refreshments.

I know I saw *Forbidden Broadway* on the first, very hot, night when small glitches can appear – the reason why I try to avoid any first performance with a full audience – but there should be no reason why your first night attendees gets a show which is less perfect than your last night, although we all know this usually happens. Apologies for this, other commitments intervened.

What a courageous decision to select this show for such a challenging venue! I know the limitations of Hyde Heath Village Hall as I have stage managed a production there. I too have had to cope with its limited space backstage for all those costume changes, not to mention the requirement for new make up and wigs from time to time, and the awkward stage entrances and exits. I noticed that the exits in particular caused problems; when everyone on stage had to get off at the same time the inevitable result was too long a delay before the next number. Your Director, Barry Dell, must have been tearing his hair out whenever this happened as a satirical revue like this one depends on pace to achieve its full impact on the audience. Some of the entrances were a tad awkward too, due, I suspect, to the access steps stage right.

Your MD, Lou Marron, with Drew Cowburn on the keyboard, worked you all hard and some numbers were very good, others, inevitably, less so.

A very small stage to contain a couple of dozen singers too! The best group number was probably *Seasons of Hype* mainly because Barry had set you all in groups, some sitting, which meant that we could see all your faces and you could all see your MD – a decided plus! Visually this worked better than rows of you on stage.

Opting for plain white flats with lighting changes was probably the only way to set this piece and Charlie Carrington, also I see responsible for the sound, did his best. I was doubtful about the wisdom of using the hazer though on such a stifling evening!

Costumes were very good, congratulations to all involved with this element. However, when wearing evening dress, ladies, watch those bra straps! A prominent white strap running alongside a dark dress strap shone out. Good advert for whichever powder washes whitest!

One thing that was really apparent was the revelation as to who can, and who can't, project their voice. Some of you are, I think, far too reliant on the mics which principals and soloists usually use on stage with the result that many of you have never learnt how to breathe properly when singing. Take a lesson from Sally Carrington's spoof Ethel Merman - 'project

from your diaphragm!'. Unfortunately, we did not hear all the words clearly and we really needed to in order to appreciate all the comedy contained in the clever lyrics.

This is a very funny show and those of you with a good sense of comedic timing stood out. Notable in this respect were Joanne Day, Katy Devine, Amber Dye, Imogen Osborne and Charlotte Stephens – all rightly featuring several times. Penny Pomroy's impersonation of Liza Minelli also showed good comedy movement and timing. Becci Andrews' very short Cosette worked well in this respect too.

Forbidden Broadway started slowly, began to get into its stride with Katie Nightingale's excellent, and very drunken, *Annie* – the extra bottle, Barry, did not quite work - but only picked up real pace with *America* from Joanne Day and Imogen Osborne .

Neil Goulder's appalling over acting in *Somewhat Overindulgent* was very well done but the Pandas really reached a peak with the *More Miserables* selection. Miming turning on a revolve was very well done indeed and some of you staggered very believably. All the numbers in this section were well performed, particularly *God It's High* from David J Martin, Louise Stephen's *I Dreamed a Show*, and *On My Phone*, very well sung by Charlotte Stephens.

In Act Two the high spots included Margaret Joyce's take on *Cats* and the three ladies in *Mamma Mia*. Imogen's expressive face and dancing were both so joyful and Theresa Goulder and LoriBeth Cameron complemented her well.

The Song They Stole From Us from *Spamalot* was the only number, I think to use most of the original words – which, as this is a spoof song itself, probably could not be improved upon. This definitely provided one of the funniest moments in the show. Katie, I loved the flippers! You have very expressive eyes which you used to the full both in this number and also over your beard in *Ambition*. David J Martin's quick moustache penciling just added to the general hilarity generated by both of you.

Emily Culverhouse's spoof Barbra Streisand number was well sung, every word projected properly too!

Katie Nightingale's top notes heard earlier were only surpassed later by her balletic ability to raise her leg over her head in *What I Did for Laughs*, to the well-expressed chagrin of the rest of the other girls on stage.

Thank you again for inviting me to report on this production; I have only picked out the numbers which were, for me, the real highlights – please don't be offended if I have not mentioned your name! I am looking forward to seeing *Oliver* next March, although I really do not want to wish the rest of the summer away too soon.

Judith Watsham
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