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THE COTSWOLD SAVOYARDS

Anything Goes

Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham

May 18th 2016

Director: Sue Bennett

Choreographer: Lisa Crowhurst

MD: David Manifold

Set on board the SS American, an ocean liner bound from New York to London, *Anything Goes* follows the adventures of its diverse set of passengers. Stowaway, Billy Crocker who is in love with heiress American Hope Harcourt, who he met in a taxi, who in turn is engaged to Englishman, Lord Evelyn Oakleigh. Throw into the mix Reno Sweeney, an evangelist turned famous night club singer, Moonface Martin and Bonny, a gangster and his 'moll', socialite Mrs Evangeline Harcourt, Hope's mother, the wonderful music of Cole Porter, you have the recipe for an entertaining evening, which this turned out to be.

The well designed and well used set from Scenery Hire Limited, took us firmly on board the liner, with ships funnel, portholes and life belts, a raised area upstage centre, with two staircases leading to the large stage area, with doors at the back and 'cabins' stowed under the stairs which were brought on as required. The stage was well lit at all times, with the changes of times of day and inside and outside well defined. The atmosphere created for 'Blow, Gabriel, Blow', was excellent; as was the lighting and sound effects for the moonlit night on the ocean. Props had been carefully sourced adding to the feel of the era. There were some striking costumes for the ladies especially Reno and her 'angels', with those for the men being appropriate and fitting well.

This show has many lively dance routines, which could cause problems for a Society which does not usually perform big dance numbers, but Lisa Crowhurst's choreography showed her vast dance experience, it was lively, energetic and entertaining, and performed confidently, I suspect forcing many of the cast out of their comfort zone.

The show had been well cast; it has a wide age range of characters giving opportunities to most society members. Hannah Boydell made a departure from the unattractive, unpleasant characters of recent years, to play Reno, the elegantly turned out, famous nightclub singer. She was every inch a true celebrity, with her poise and glamour, and was treated as such by the other characters, completely in control in every way from her first appearance, singing, dancing and acting her way through the show, with an excellent American accent, good sense of timing and wonderful facial expressions. Gary Lines as Billy Crocker, the rather hapless employee of Elisha J Whitney, made the most of the humour of the role, taking on the identity of 'Snake Eyes Johnson' Public Enemy 1, and then spending his voyage trying to escape capture by an array of most unlikely disguises. He had some lovely scenes with Reno and Hope. Rachel Prudence brought sincerity to the rather more serious role of Hope Harcourt, who is in love with Billy but is duty bound to marry her English Lord to save the family fortune. Paul Chesworth obviously enjoyed himself as Moonface Martin, Public Enemy 13, who provided many of the laughs, giving a relaxed performance. Samuel J Taunton as Lord Evelyn Oakleigh was a bit of a buffoon, getting into all sorts of difficulties trying to master the American language.

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

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Lesley Hendrie, was confident as Mrs Evangeline Harcourt, Hope's rather overbearing mother, and a bit of a snob. David Roberts as businessman Elisha J Whitney, seemed to enjoy bumbling around the stage without his spectacles, and having too much to drink. Lola, Mrs Harcourt's dog, behaved beautifully, even when Billy was trying to cut her fur to make a false beard. You often hear people say, 'I'm only in the chorus' but a strong chorus is vital to any show, and this one supported the action well, with their dancing, singing and responses.

This show has such lovely music with many of the numbers so well known such as 'You're The Top', 'It's Delovely' and 'I Get A Kick Out Of You'. The orchestra under Musical Director David Manifold, was well controlled and balanced, unfortunately it is a 'brassy' show and sometimes the underscoring with dialogue was too powerful and we lost the dialogue. Everyone was in fine voice and sang well, giving sympathetic renditions of Porter's songs. The principals worked well together and there were lovely duets and solos, again with high quality support from the chorus. I was a little disappointed with 'Blow, Gabriel, Blow', it started as a really powerful number with Reno on the upper level, excellent arrangement of cast and atmospheric lighting, but as she was moving down the steps we lost her singing, as this is such an upbeat number where the brass are given full rein. However the balance returned when Reno was fully downstage. This is one occasion when amplification was needed to carry voice over the orchestra.

Director Sue Bennett had worked well with her cast who created confident characters, both principals and cameos. The stage was always used well with full advantage being taken of the stairs and upper level so that no one was hidden and we could see the cast reacting throughout. She must have been pleased with the end results in this lively, well-paced and energetic show. Well done everyone.

*Frankie Telford.
Regional Representative. District 15.*

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