

Hello Dolly! - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (2nd March) 2011 Review by Cheryl Rogers

Hello Dolly! A wonderful score, big dance numbers, colourful sets and costumes; this is a show full of comedy and with lots of characters. Unfortunately it followed on the heels of 'Beauty and The Beast', the autumn CAODS production, and in comparison this was a rather lack lustre performance hindered by a having smaller cast and too few male chorus members

The story of the famous matchmaker Dolly Levi and the couples she is attempting to pair up, including herself and Horace Vandergelder, is well known from both the stage show and the film musical. Kim Anderson played Dolly and made the most of the part, especially the big scene at the Harmonia Gardens restaurant which was well done and funny. Kim knew her dialogue extremely well which allowed her to speak at the breakneck speed required of the over talkative Jewish character that Dolly is. Dolly's songs need a voice with a wide range, using very high notes and also a chest voice for the more 'gutsy' belting numbers and I was disappointed that she had to use the option of singing down the lower octave during several numbers but she did a good job in making the transition smooth. Horace Vandergelder was played with great presence by Richard Harrison, regrettably there wasn't more for him to sing in this show as he has a fine voice. When it came to the supporting roles I have to say that both Cornelius (Rob Burdett) and Barnaby (Adam Rollingson) did not quite capture the fun and spontaneity of the characters but were trying very hard, given their lack of experience in principal roles. Sadly there was no chemistry between any of the couples. However, for me the shining star of the evening was Cassie Estall as Mrs Molloy. Not only did she look enchanting but she achieved the poise and wistful air that made a perfect portrayal of Mrs Molloy. Her rendition of the lovely 'Ribbons Down My Back' was delightful. Cassie is one to watch. A mention must also go to Karen Whitehead who brought the right touch of comedy to the cameo part of Ernestina.

As previously mentioned I thought the company scenes were lacking in exuberance, especially the parade scene – saved by some funny 'business' between Vandergelder and the mannequin on the carnival float. The deficiency of male dancers was especially apparent during the famous 'Waiters' Gallop' although this was amusingly covered by the director, using the girls dressed as men, complete with short black wigs and pencil thin moustaches. This was a clever tactic but could not compensate for the splendid display of male acrobatics that is usually associated with this number in the show. Finally I must make mention of the band. Just the right volume and doing great justice to this music score, under the direction of Patrick Tucker.

Although I do not think this was CAODS finest hour, I find that I'm still singing the songs two days later, which shows how a good musical can stand the test of time – which brings me to their next production 'Annie Get Your Gun'. Can't wait to see it!

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards