

“Anything Goes”, Chelmsford Operatic and Dramatic Society – Civic Theatre, Chelmsford



Anything Goes was first staged in 1934 but despite several changes and re-writes since it still boasts so many memorable songs plus a cracking storyline and therefore is still as fresh today for modern audiences.

CAODS took this show and made it their own. It is definitely a company show but it would be nothing without some of the principals. Leading the cast is Robyn Gowers as Reno Sweeney, she has great onstage sex appeal very reminiscent of a 1950's pin up such as Rita Hayworth or Betty Grable and she delivers an outstanding performance with great ease and style both in numbers such as 'You're the Top' and the larger ensemble pieces such as 'Anything Goes' and 'Blow Gabriel'. She was a joy to watch and particularly comes into her own in the comedy scenes with Kevin Abrey as Sir Evelyn Oakleigh. Kevin is another star of this show, his comic timing is impeccable and he squeezes every drop of it out of this English Aristocrat with his strong stage presence – pure heaven!

Another highlight of the show for me was Kieran Bacon as Moonface Martin, public enemy number 13! He has great energy on stage and plays the perfect stereotypical 1920's gangster making him quite lovable and so enjoyable to watch. His partner was Jill Gordon as Bonnie, I struggled to understand her dialogue in many places – perhaps down to poor diction or first-night nerves but she when she was on form, she was bright and bubbly and added to the overall action well.

Other principals who also deserve a mention are Thomas Harper as Billy Crocker whose crazy antics meant he was like a Duracell bunny bouncing all around the stage and the enchanting Katie Doran as Hope Harcourt. Both played their roles convincingly as the young lovers and delivered some splendid musical numbers particularly 'All through the Night' although my only comment is that Hope spoke with a beautiful English accent while she sang with an American one!

Helen Hart as Mrs. Harcourt had great class, in fact, you could almost believe she had walked straight off the set of Downton Abbey with her refined English upper-class portrayal and David Slater as Elisha Whitney delivered some cracking one liners and gave a good strong character performance.

But of course, the real highlight of the show are the large company numbers. I counted that there were at least 18+ tappers performing the final number of Act One and all the company numbers delivered on every level. Some numbers felt a little slow and laboured, particularly 'Heaven Hop' which could have done with a moving on a bit to give it the extra boost it needed but that is a minor issue.

The set looked great and despite a few opening night teething problems with some slow and noisy scene changes, it was the perfect backdrop for some stunning costumes, which were some of the best I have seen for a while and made it a true spectacle. I also noted the number of costumes each company member appeared to have and as a result, the subsequent costume changes for many of the cast. Some of these must have been incredibly fast and they were complete with matching accessories and matching coloured shoes, which possibly went unnoticed by the general audience but these little touches all add to the finished product.

This was a fantastic show and I defy anyone not to leave the theatre after watching it without smile on your face and humming the delightful Cole Porter melodies