

Dirty Rotten Scoundrels - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (3rd March 2018)

Review by Cheryl Rogers

This musical has a storyline that's frequently used in theatrical productions. It follows a couple of likeable con men and their schemes to outwit a susceptible public - with a couple of romantic involvements along the way. The setting is the French Riviera and this set was perfectly lit, with a sparkling deep blue sea in the background, behind the elegant balustrade of a hotel. The ladies' cast were beautifully costumed in elegant gowns and hats, in fact this production was an extravaganza of costumes. So far, so normal, and I must say that this tale doesn't really have any great surprises for an audience, so it relies on the leading characters to make the most of the personalities and the gags.

Luckily CAODS have a seasoned professional in Barry Hester, taking the lead role of Laurence Jameson, and he is tailor-made for the part. This is the style of comedy that Barry can do without effort and he shouldered this role naturally, slipping from one accent to another as he took on various characters in his bid to hoodwink his prey. He delivered his comedy songs with a twinkle in his eye and gave a nice sentimental touch to 'Love Sneaks In', showing the unexpected human side of this trickster. Another 'Dirty Rotten Scoundrel' was Freddie Benson played by Kieran Bacon. This was the young pretender, the cocky apprentice being tutored by Laurence in the art of deception, who tried to outdo his more experienced partner in crime. Personally I didn't feel much chemistry between these two performers, they lacked a certain connection in my opinion but as I've said many times before, you can't always have perfect casting in an amateur show. Claire Carr made her appearance three quarters of the way through act one, with a burst of colour and a rousing version of 'Here I Am'. She sparkled her way around the stage in all her scenes as the infamous 'Jackal' alias millionaire Soap Queen - Christine Colgate, looking stunning in all her fabulous gowns and lingerie! Helen Meah also gave us a spirited and outrageous performance as Jolene Oakes, the 'over the top', southern, Dolly Parton styled character, very well performed. More scoundrels were added to the collection with David Slater as Andre Thibault, the corrupt policeman with a good French accent and paired nicely with Helen Hart playing Muriel Eubanks beautifully, as his love interest. Her rendition of 'What Was a Woman To Do' was excellent and nicely complemented by a few of the ladies who joined her in this number.

This was not the usual CAODS fare, being a little risqué at times and with a surprising inclusion of a swear word but such is modern theatre and they stepped up to the plate with fun and aplomb, showing that this company are not shy of tackling anything. 'Top Hat' is their next presentation 25th – 29th September 2018 and I can only imagine how spectacular this one is going to be. Put the date in your diaries – you won't want to miss it!