

**The Witches of Eastwick - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (28<sup>th</sup> September)**

Review by Cheryl Rogers

In my last review of a CAODS production I said I couldn't wait to see what they did with this show. Well, now I know and I can only say it was worth the wait!

The storyline is far too complicated to explain in detail here but suffice to say, three divorcees in the New England town of Eastwick, try to conjure up their perfect man and shortly afterwards a stranger appears in town, Darryl Van Horne, who we begin to realise is the Devil in disguise. He manages, by his charm and charisma, to seduce all the three women who are so smitten that they accept a cosy 'foursome' in their desire to continue their relationships with him. Gradually they succumb to his teachings and begin to dabble in the dark arts, especially in fairly harmless revenge against the town busybody, Felicia Gabriel. It all spirals out of control and ends in tears.

Now make no mistake, this was a brave undertaking for an amateur society. Not only did the technical crew have great responsibility in flying the witches but this is not a musical with content that most amateur theatre audiences expect from a local company. Oklahoma it ain't! There was plenty of innuendo, sex and the use of bad language, which came as a bit of a shock to some audience members if the audible intake of breath was anything to go by. However, none of this was used gratuitously but with humour, as a means to portray the character of Darryl as he slipped from charming seducer to nasty piece of work and it was not out of place in this modern setting. It must be said that there were problems with the sound control, resulting in the music sometimes overpowering the voices, which was a pity and spoiled the experience for some.

The success of this show depends entirely on the ability of the three witches and Darryl, the antihero, to engage with the audience. Here CAODS was off to a head start with Gareth Barton playing Darryl Van Horne brilliantly. He looked the part, flirted with the audience, boasted a pelvic movement that would have put Tom Jones to shame and made the most of every witty line in the script - his suggestive one-liners were hilarious - plus which he could really sing. Claire Carr as the arty Alexandra Spofford was superb; independent and worldly wise, with eyes that sparkled as if truly bewitched. Sarah Barton played Jane Smart, the musician (lovely piece of theatrical trickery here as the cello played itself whilst Darryl played her), she exuded the trust and gullibility of her character. Alison Hartley played our final witch, Suki Rougemont, with her hesitant speech and insecurities she was delightful. These girls, though all excellent on their own, when together were truly formidable. Their voices blended perfectly and the closeness between them as friends was so believable it was almost tangible. When they took to the air in the flying sequence, it made a stunning finale to the first act.

Supporting these principal players was a line-up of other talented cast members. Debra Sparshott was a thoroughly dislikeable Felicia Gabriel (as intended of course), she played this part very well. Kevin Richards was her long suffering husband Clive, good casting as comic timing is his forte. The young lovers, David Gillet and Alice Masters were excellent both vocally and in their character portrayals and Wylie Queenan as Fidel provided many amusing moments. The ensemble and dancers brought the big chorus numbers to life with great enthusiasm, 'Dirty Laundry' and 'Dance with the Devil' being lively and colourful.

So, I'm guessing the audience for the main part didn't know the songs and certainly the tunes aren't memorable enough to go home singing but this musical was different, daring and delightful. I think your courage paid off CAODS, you've blazed the trail for newer musicals and hopefully will continue

to occasionally present these modern productions instead of always the tried and tested. With the director, Sallie Warrington at her best, it must have been such fun to do and was a lot of fun to watch.

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards