

## **BARNUM**

### **CAODS at the Civic Theatre, Chelmsford**

**29.09.16**

#### **Review by Michael Gray**

What a trooper !

Phineas T Barnum, showman extraordinaire, master of flim-flam and humbug, is, he might boast, a role in a million.

And here's charismatic, cheeky Simon Bristoe thwarted at the final hurdle by an unfortunate accident. In the West End, of course, that'd be another big-name no-show. But not for CAODS. Brave Mr Bristoe limps gamely through the show – no high-wire for him, of course, and limited dance, but a performance of admirable pizzazz and pathos as the legendary impresario. He has an excellent voice for the role, too, though microphone problems robbed us of the opening Sucker number.

Not quite a three-ring circus, but by no means a one-man show. Stand-out performances from Rachel Summers as the Swedish Nightingale, Oli Budino as a lively Tom Thumb [an excellent number with a giant chair and stilt-walkers] and Claire Carr as PTB's long-suffering proto-feminist wife. Great work too from Barry Hester's Ringmaster and Bailey, and Tamara Anderson supplying smoky vocals in the impressive Black & White number. Brad Wendes contributed his circus expertise and some thrilling stunts.

Ray Jeffery's energetic production was a treat for the ear [Bryan Cass the MD] and the eye: the gilded chorus girls, the bright, breezy Follow the Band, and, amongst the quieter moments, the reprise of Colours of My Life, with the passing of Charity poignantly suggested by a muted chorus of jugglers.

The show-stopping Circus number was a carefully crafted crescendo of tricks and tumbling, stopping just short of the circle of fire ...

Excellent work from a huge company, colourful and constantly enjoyable. Much more impact than the recent Chichester production; as Colonel Tom Thumb reminds us, Bigger is not always Better.