

Copacabana - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre

(28th February) 2012 Review by Cheryl Rogers

'The hottest spot north of Havana' must have been the Civic theatre on the opening night of C.A.O.D.S production of 'Copacabana'! It may have been their first night but the cast rose to the occasion and nobody would have believed that they hadn't been running for much longer. With just a few minor glitches, this show was slick and polished, congratulations to the cast and their dressers for the way they coped with the many extravagant costumes, I was told there were two hundred and twenty five in total!

Written by Barry Manilow, this show tells the story of a young man endeavouring to write a hit musical and how the people in his real life are unconsciously reflected in the fictional characters of his imagination. The greater part of the show is set in the Copacabana Nightclub in the nineteen forties, later shifting to Havana for some glorious Latin themed numbers. To successfully undertake a production of this distinction a company needs a large dancing cast, talented actors and a high budget to create the spectacle. Fortunately C.A.O.D.S has all this in abundance and used it to full advantage.

From the opening moments when the band struck up those well known tunes, we were in the mood for Manilow! The first big number 'Just Arrived' saw each of the girls arriving in New York, dressed in a different vibrant coloured outfit, complete with same colour accessories and even suitcases – they looked and sounded fabulous and it set the tone of the show to come. The leading lady, Lola, was played enchantingly by Cassie Estall who looked beautiful, with her excellent singing and dancing adding to the complete package – a joy! Steve Ames played our leading man Tony, he had the unenviable task of singing all those iconic songs made famous by Barry Manilow, whose distinctive voice and rendition, make him a hard act to follow. I think Steve will gain confidence as the week progresses and he settles into the role. The comedy moments were provided, superbly, by Patrick Tucker and Diana Baker as Sam, the owner of the Copacabana and Gladys, the ex Copa Girl. Patrick has brilliant comedy timing, he was hilarious and Diana has exactly the right personality to deliver the cynical one-liners, the characters fitted them to perfection, their song 'Who Am I Kidding' joined by other cast members, was a lot of fun and well staged. Then we get to Rico, the villain of the piece and a nasty character, played very convincingly by Gareth Barton. His great stage presence, strong voice and excellent acting made him every inch the greasy gangster from Cuba. He was paired with Karen Kelleher as Conchita, his abused girlfriend. Karen captured the vulnerability of the once famous nightclub star, now rejected for a younger model. She had everything this part called for and I loved her performance. The chorus sang and danced their way effortlessly through number after number, looking wonderful. They seemed to be having a fine time – and so were we. Directed by Sallie Warrington with great panache - from the glitzy nightclub numbers with their amazing show girl costumes and capes sprinkled with tiny lights, to the fabulous finale with practically everyone in hot pink sequins - what a dazzling delight! They did Barry Manilow proud.

Photo by Christopher Yorke-Edwards