

Anything Goes - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (25th September) 2008 Review by Cheryl Rogers

This is the sort of amateur show that makes musical theatre enthusiasts happy! They know the songs, love the dance numbers and laugh at all the jokes – but only if they are done well enough, and in this performance of Cole Porter's 'Anything Goes' they certainly were. The well known songs came thick and fast – De Lovely, I Get a Kick Out Of You, You're The Top and so many more – they just kept coming. There was a strong line up of principals, all of whom seemed to be relishing their roles, and the fun that they were having just rolled off the stage and infected their audience. This is a funny show with some good comedy lines and none of these performers wasted a single one, they played every last line to the hilt. The action is set aboard a cruise liner and the 'star' of the show is Reno Sweeney, a nightclub singer. She was played by Kirstie Wooldridge, a girl with a great presence on stage and a great voice too, an ideal choice for this part as she is also a good comedy actress. The plot twists and turns with too many complications to detail here but involves a stowaway, Billy Crocker, played by John Goodfellow who executed the part well both in his singing and dancing. He is in love with an heiress, Hope Harcourt, who is engaged to Lord Evelyn Oakleigh and the story mainly revolves around the various characters as they aid Billy in his quest to win Hope. Hope was beautifully played by Karen Kelleher who looked every inch the classic debutante and sang her numbers delightfully. Evelyn Oakleigh (Kevin Abrey) won over the audience with his portrayal of the upper class 'twit' and had some good comedy moments. A sub plot involving a New York gangster (David Pridige) and his side kick Erma (Laura Bradley) brought two more larger than life characters into the action and provided even more humour. David Pridige was obviously having a marvellous time playing Moonface Martin, and made a fine job of it. This duo was ably supported by the sailors and the Chinese gamblers. So, all these, plus Hope's mother, Evangeline played by Deanna Tucker who does comedy and elegance equally well, made for a strong cast.

The band was exactly right - not too loud (usual complaint from the audience) they seemed to be part of the musical numbers instead of competing with them. This, I suspect, is the benefit of having an MD (Patrick Tucker) who is also a performer, it was great to see the band on stage too.

Of course, this was an amateur production so not everything was without criticism. I missed the chorus not being in as many numbers in this version of the show as they always look so enthusiastic when they get a chance to perform, and being a bit 'picky' the song and dance duets looked contrived and had no flow. However, the title song and big tap number involving the whole cast in the finale of act one, was excellent and act two opened with another great full cast number, Blow Gabriel Blow. A small but significant observation is that the whole female cast was wearing beautifully styled wigs of the period, which gave the whole look a professional touch.

I enjoyed this show more than I expected to, as it's not one of my favourites, so I am looking forward to seeing their next production in the spring and advise anyone who doesn't normally go to see amateur theatre to give it a try, it's a good night out.