

Here's some excerpts from a few of the many letters we received after *Chess*. We start with a special review for this Newsletter by Peter Andrews, life member of the Society, who writes for the Arts section of the *Weekly News*.

"My most hearty congratulations to CAODS on choosing *Chess* for its autumn production as it presented the cast with a real challenge, besides being different from any of the other sixty-five CAODS shows I have seen.

Inspired by director Ray Jeffery's brilliant, but simple, conception of the show, this challenge was, overall, well and truly met and I left the Civic on Tuesday night with a host of abiding memories. For instance, the brilliantly executed Cossack-style dance on the floor in Act II, and the opening dance which so brilliantly underlined the gladiatorial nature of championship chess, both sent tremors of excitement down my spine.

*Chess*, of course, has less dialogue than the traditional musical and calls for a near operatic style of singing and the fact that this came off so well was in large measure due to the brilliance of musical director Jane Wernham who achieved the best balance between voice and orchestra I've heard in any CAODS show.

Next, let me get out of the way the two reservations I had about *Chess*, the chief of which was that for all their inspiring attack, more work needed to be done on the diction of the chorus. *Chess* is one of those musicals where the audience needs to hear every word. It was poor diction that would have forced me, had I been adjudicating, to take a mark or two off Kim Webster's otherwise commanding performance as Florence Vassy. She has a real stage presence and a voice that possesses a silver tone and she puts her characterisation over with conviction, but she swallowed some of her key words so that they didn't carry to the back of the theatre.

I have no such reservations about Patrick Tucker's performance as Anatoly. Quite simply this was his best show to date; both voice and acting style have been refined over the years and now have a degree of silkiness and smoothness that added an extra degree of poignancy to his portrayal of a fundamentally decent chap who just wanted to get on with playing chess with the minimum of interference from the state. His singing of *Anthem* at the end of Act I took the theatre apart in a way that very few amateurs and not all that many professionals can achieve and his whole performance was flecked with moments of genius.

Deanna Tucker as Svetlana may not appear until the second Act, but her performance was a truly memorable one. Her new singing teacher has strengthened her chest register immeasurably and this, plus the restrained nature of her acting, gave an extra cutting edge to her performance. Well done!

There is no more reliable cast member than Barry Hester whose performance as Frederick Trumper helped balance up the production perfectly.

Philip Crapnell's Molokov was a chilling study of political manipulation with the musical and dramatic elements of his performance blending together into a perfect fusion. An air of uncomfortable tension pervaded the theatre whenever he was on stage.

Two more performances of sterling merit were provided by Kevin Richards as the Arbiter and John Escott as the American broadcaster who saw all human triumphs and tragedies in terms of effective broadcasts. Neither of these parts were among the most rewarding but both were played with real authority.

The open set worked splendidly and there was always plenty to retain the eye's interest, not least in the moments of total stillness when the chess champions were locked in eyeball conflict.

I apologise for going on at some length but *Chess*, apart from being a totally enjoyable show, could well mark the start of another chapter in the Society's history. And if shows of this nature are going to be presented, as they surely must, then the question of forging still closer links between CAODS and Young Gen must be considered." PA

"I feel compelled to write to you to express our appreciation. An immensely complex musical to tackle, your members delivered such a polished performance that truly it was difficult to believe that yours was an amateur production. Kim Webster as Florence captivated us with sheer presence; Philip Crapnell as Molokov was made for the part; Barry Hester as The American was simply brilliant! The whole cast delivered such a powerful performance ... Your production of *Chess* has quite simply knocked the spots of anything I have seen done by other amateur societies".

"I felt I must write and say how much we enjoyed *Chess* ... from curtain up until the finale we were enthralled by the whole production. We see most of your shows and always enjoy them, but *Chess* needed so much dedication as regards the learning of the music and in the production generally ..."

"We attended last night's show and thought it was wonderful. You could say we were *Chess* aficionados, having seen the show fifty times in the West End alone ..."

"WOW!! What a show ... The whole show kept us captivated. The singing, dancing, staging etc was like a professional show... Please pass our congratulations to all concerned in *Chess*."

"There were many excellent and very flattering things being said on Saturday. I enjoyed watching it very much ... I loved the music." RJ

"The Russian language sounded excellent." [Thanks Melanie - Ed]

What more can I say? - RC