

SEPT 2000

Spectacular show tells a sad story

**Mack & Mabel,
CAODS,
Civic Theatre**

MACK and Mabel tells the sad story of the downfall of pioneer studio boss Mack Sennett and the girl he falls in love with.

CAODS are the first amateur group in this area to get their hands on it, following its West End run and there are funny moments, but it is not laugh-a-minute stuff.

Ray Jeffery created a spectacular show out of unpromising material and gave us memorable sequences chronicling the early history of Hollywood two-reel melodramas, Keystone Cops and Bathing Belles.

I liked the symbolism of the

numbers starting in black and white then gradually going into colour.

Barry Hester as Mack Sennett, has an open, honest face, not the mental picture of the chiselling shyster. But he has a fine voice and excelled in the sad, reflective pieces.

Kate Dobinson, as Mabel, was sweet and natural – perfect for the virgin she starts off as. But it could have hardened more as she degenerated into excess and corruption.

CONVINCING

Diana Baker as the wordly-wise Lottie and John Escott/Graham Bagulay as the hard-nosed backers were convincing.

Patrick Tucker always gives full value for money and his Fatty Arbuckle will stay with me for a long time.

Writers Herman and Stewart are not Rogers and Hammerstein. The songs are not especially memorable, and, despite Andrew Denyer's well-rounded musical direction, the bond between storyline and music is lacking.

The production is saved by the aforementioned spectacular production numbers and lavish sets. There was even a "cinemascope" curve of more than 60 on stage at one point.

A tap-dancing sequence that grew out of chaotic clattering into a slick and synchronised beat was exciting.

Jim Hutchon