

**Kipps – The New Half A Sixpence - Chelmsford Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society at the Civic Theatre (26<sup>th</sup> March 2022)**

Review by Cheryl Jennings

For those who haven't heard, 'Kipps' is the new stage version of the musical 'Half a Sixpence.' It tells the story of Arthur Kipps, an assistant in a draper's shop in Folkestone – Shalford's Bazaar- at the turn of the century. He unexpectedly inherits a fortune which propels him into high society and the company of a beautiful socialite, causing him to forget about the childhood sweetheart and life he left behind.

This is a musical brimming with song and dance numbers and Arthur (Artie) Kipps is centre stage the whole time. Needless to say, this part carries a huge responsibility and requires an energetic young man who can sing, dance and act in equal measures, he also needs plenty of charisma. CAODS chose Tom Harper-Gray to take on this demanding role, a company member who has played many supporting roles but never taken the principal male lead – until now. What a choice! I can't imagine a better casting as Tom endeared himself to the audience both with his cheeky good looks, excellent voice and dancing. Song by song had him energetically making the stage his own particularly in 'Pick Out A Simple Tune' and 'Flash, Bang, Wallop.' His performance was first class.

There are many principal characters in this show, they all got a chance to show their talents in song and dance and what a talented team they made, there wasn't a weak link among them.

Joanne Quinney who played Ann, the childhood sweetheart of Artie, is consistently good at everything she has done with this group. She brought the right common and gentle touch to the character whilst still making her feisty and for me one of the outstanding numbers in the show was when she teamed up with Flo (one of the shop girls) played beautifully by Charlotte Broad, to bring a lively touch of comedy to 'Just A Little Touch of Happiness'. Both girls making the most of the double entendre of the lyrics. They have lovely voices that blended really well together. Katie Doran made a beautiful and elegant Helen Walsingham, the socialite who Artie falls for and who eventually causes him to realise that he does not belong in high society. If Katie is lovely to look at she is equally good to listen to, having a pure, clear voice. She played her part perfectly.

Jonathan Davis played the actor, playwright and producer Chitterlow, who befriends Artie, discovers that he is named as the heir to a great fortune and ultimately restores Artie's lost inheritance in the end. Jonathan is no stranger to CAODS and this role suited him very well, allowing him free reign to express the extrovert personality of Chitterlow whose every word is a theatrical performance. What a lot of fun to play and Jonathan obviously relished it, especially in 'The Joy of the Theatre' number. Jonathan suits this type of comedy, he is an experienced thespian himself and brought an extra element to this show, the audience clearly enjoyed his performance. The shop boys, Artie's friends from his old life, were played excellently by Michael Bardo (Sid), Jimmy Hooper (Buggins) and Kieran Bacon (Pierce). They brought their characters to life, giving them individuality and likeability. Their quartet with Artie 'In The Middle There's Me' was one of my favourite numbers and the harmonies

were a joy to listen to. Well done lads! Diana Easton, Robyn Gowers, Ian Gilbert, John Sullivan and Gareth Barton also gave amusing performances. Diana and Robyn are both excellent at comedy and were good foils for each other.

Now to the huge company numbers. First I must congratulate the wardrobe team as everyone looked fabulous, especially the ladies. The gowns were magnificent and the wigs beautifully styled, much attention to detail was in evidence in the men's costumes too. For such a large company the big musical numbers saw them moving effortlessly round the stage as much at home in the gentle 'If The Rain's Got to Fall' as in the raucous and very funny 'Flash, Bang, Wallop'. They sounded superb, brought the stage alive wielding their banjos in the finale and were so deserving of the exuberant response from their audience at the end.

My final accolade must go to Claire Carr, the director and choreographer of this production. Claire is a talented performer and now proves her worth as a director and choreographer for this respected local company as this was her debut with CAODS in this particular role. Congratulations to her and to all the cast for such a joyous rendition of this musical.

Photo by Brad Wendes.