



Society : Slough, Windsor and Maidenhead Theatre Company
Production : **THE PRODUCERS**
Date : 26th July, 2011
Venue : Theatre Royal, Windsor
Report by : Barrie Theobald, NODA London Membership Secretary

Report

As you know your Regional Rep. was unable to report on your production due to his involvement in a production being staged by his own Society at the same time as you were 'on' and, having chuckled my way through the West End presentation a couple of years ago, I was delighted to be invited to deputise for him and see how an amateur group would cope with the many challenges presented by the show. May I say here and now that not only did you equal that professional production, you exceeded it beyond my wildest dreams! I would have written that even had I not managed to speak (separately) to both Simon and Gemma after the show and hearing from them some of the problems you encountered with your Tech and Dress rehearsals, and in a way am sorry now that my only free night (Tuesday) meant that I had to attend your opening night because I know that they will have created subtle changes to overcome some of the long scene changes we experienced.

The opening chorus *Opening Night* certainly gave us a taste of the quality of performance that was to follow.

MATTHEW FILMORE (Max Bialystock) gave an excellent portrayal as the one time 'King of Broadway' who, having regularly fleeced his elderly female backers in return for playing sexual games with them was more than ready to go for the easy money Leo forecast could be achieved! As well as being involved in many musical numbers with other members of the cast, Matthew's powerful solo delivery of *Betrayed* in the prison scene was particularly well accomplished.

ANDY SONDEN (Leo Bloom) effortlessly assumed the mantle of this complex character. From the insecure accountant we first encountered (regularly needing to seek comfort from his blanket!) we saw him change as he gained confidence by walking away from his former job, finding love and then becoming man enough to return from Rio to face the court and prison. He conveyed much of this by a wonderful array of facial expressions and 'body language' that was clearly visible from my seat in the back row of the stalls. Andy also competently delivered all his vocal items with the same attention to his character's mood, giving a superb all-round performance. Congratulations.

ADELE JOHNSON (Ulla Inga Hansen Benson Yonsen Tallen-Hallen) lived up to her motto of '*When You've Got It, Flaunt It*' making a real impact from her first entry. Remaining in character throughout, Adele kept her Swedish 'accent' well, even during her musical numbers. It was a shame the set did not afford an opportunity for her to repaint the office – there was a limit to the number of times she could flick her feather mop around! (Did the amateur version omit the final two names, Svaden Swanson, that appears in the professional lib or was this a programme error? I have to admit I did not pay attention when you first introduced yourself!).

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PAUL FREEMAN (Franz Liebkind) the pigeon-keeping author of *Springtime for Hitler*. The role provides many opportunities to go ‘OTT’ and Paul seized these with delight, making great use of his facial expressions. Both *In Old Bavaria* and *Der Gluten Tag Hop-Clop* revealed his ability to deliver the corny lyrics with complete conviction and a straight face. Later appearances (on and off crutches) maintained his character.

PAUL SHEPPARD (Roger de Bris) the worst director in town! I loved the way Paul underplayed this over-the-top flamboyant role rather playing it simply for laughs and losing the subtleties of the character. This was a carefully crafted performance where experience shone through, readily letting the character lead the way in both his dialogue and his musical numbers, especially in *Keep It Gay* and *Springtime for Hitler*.

DAMIEN SOLLESSE (Carmen Ghia) Of all the principal players in this production, Damien is the only one I can claim to know personally, having watched him develop from his days performing with a local youth group in Shinfield, through his professional acting career to the present day. He has that happy knack of immersing himself in a role and ‘living’ it whenever he is on stage, whether or not he is the focal point at that time. With that insight, I can confidently say that Carmen was Damien (or vice versa!) His strong singing voice came through in all his ensemble numbers

CHORUS

The show opened with a lively interpretation of *Opening Night/King of Old Broadway*. This involved all the cast with Usherettes **DEBBIE CHRISTIE, SARAH CLARKE, SARAH DUNLEAVEY, NEALA HOLLAND, LYNNE LE MARCHAND** and **CHARLOTTE WESTON** and an assortment of theatre-goers. Later scenes offer a wealth of cameo roles, too numerous to mention them all, but all of them well portrayed. Amongst these roles we saw **DEBBIE CHRISTIE** again, this time as an elderly backer keen to play her sexy games before handing over her cash, **JEAN JOHNSON** and **JENI MONEY** as two further backers easily parted from their money and **ROMAN LACH** as the demanding Chief Accountant Mr. Marks. **RYAN STEVENS** featured in several roles, notably as Kevin and the Stormtrooper and **JORDAN RAMROOP**, who earlier had featured as Bryan and a policeman, later presided over the court proceedings as the Judge. The fun was hyped up with Max, Leo, Roger and Carmen leading Roger’s boys, **DOMINIC BELCHER, CHRISTOPHER CHARLES, CAMERON ROJOW** and **REECE YORK**, in *Keep It Gay*. Reece appeared later as a Police Sergeant (Irish, of course!). There was a truly exceptional performance by the ladies on their zimmer frames, both vocally and choreographically and *Springtime For Hitler* afforded opportunities for the whole chorus to appear as stormtroopers or glamorous showgirls. All of the chorus work appeared to be well-rehearsed, both vocally and choreographically and never sagged. I did wonder how you would cope with the very steep rake of the Theatre Royal stage – I can remember the feeling in my calf muscles when I walked across it many years ago, but everyone appeared to be coping well on Tuesday night.

PRODUCTION

ALICIA WALKER and her team worked hard with the scene changes but on the night I came some of them were rather slow (particularly the office scenes). I appreciate the problems you experienced with get-in and tech rehearsal time and know that both Simon and Gemma closely watched the first night performance to see where time could be saved, but the ad nauseum musical interlude repeats did not really help. I think the audience would have preferred to watch the scene changes happen under low lighting rather than sit in the dark whilst they were performed.

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Props sourced by **MARGARET LYNCH** and **MARTYN PINNOCK** had been well thought through and complemented the scenery/era. I was surprised that Scenic Projects apparently didn't supply any flats for the repainted office scenes in Act 2. Poor Ulla was hard-put to find surfaces to dust after the interval (and audiences viewing the show for the first time may have been bemused by the mention of the redecoration of the office in the programme notes!).

MARINA BANFIELD and **ISABELLE FOLEY** oversaw the use of the costumes supplied by Costume Workshop. Their costumes always look fresh, clean and were appropriate to the show's time.

It was not clear from the programme whether the technical side of the show was managed by the in-house staff at the Theatre Royal or whether this was something SWMTC had much of an input to. **STUART WEST**'s lighting design and **DAN HERBERT**'s sound design worked well most of the time. Occasionally the preset lights 'missed' a performer (who was probably not quite in the right place) and there were instances when radio mics appeared to be malfunctioning.

I imagine the interesting and detailed programme was produced for you by the Theatre Royal.

GEMMA HOUGH (Choreographer) set some excellent dance routines for the full ensemble numbers and the smaller numbers, making full use of the space available in the Theatre Royal stage. I was impressed by the 'Village People' take off during *Keep It Gay*, the intricate moves in the Act 1 finale (ladies on zimmer frames and waving them up in the air) and the *Springtime For Hitler* intricate routines.

PETER DODSWORTH (Musical Director) The musical numbers were well-performed, repaying the hard work that had obviously gone into them. Peter ensured the orchestra gave sympathetic accompaniment to the singers and it was very pleasing to clearly hear most of the lyrics in the back row of the stalls.

SIMON WOODBRIDGE (Director) certainly got the best out of all his large cast. I admit I was apprehensive when I first heard SMWTC's choice of show for their summer production, but in Simon's skilled hands, with both Peter's and Gemma's input, the show was a great success and I hope all the efforts resulted in a financially successful production too.

Thank you for inviting Jean and I to your production. Rest assured that none of the minor 'niggles' I've mentioned in the report detracted from our view that this was a most entertaining evening's theatre. We congratulate you all on the very high standard achieved.

Best wishes

Barrie