

THE ROSE BOWL AWARDS

FOR AMATEUR
DRAMA & MUSIC

NAME OF COMPANY	Hanham Folk Centre Players
NAME OF PRODUCTION	Annie
VENUE	Hanham Folk Centre
DATE	Friday 07 October 2005
ADJUDICATOR	Barbara Smith

OVERALL PRODUCTION

A difficult show to put upon a small stage and careful planning needs to be done to enable the swift scene changes to be effected – and that planning is mainly the Set conception. This production could have moved with a faster pace had there been minimal Set changing – a split Set with use of levels and cloths and clever lighting would have been a way round this problem. The other problem is of course the mic-ing quality and levels which have to be modulated for each performer and instrument, and often the Orchestra was too overpowering, and Annie also at times overpowered and should have been modulated in order to give a softer projection. The singing input generally could have been given more modulation – every number has soft/harder qualities rather than a general ‘strong’ projection. Costumes were excellently conceived and the Orphans a delight with excellent direction. Characterisation was effective, and the musical combination of instruments was fine for the small venue. There had obviously been a lot of honest and well focused direction with this production and all on stage were well motivated and energised, but the overall pace kept flagging with the constant and long scene changes with a Set that was not always well designed or painted. An ambitious piece of musical theatre on a very limiting stage and which achieved with the obvious dedication, sincerity and enjoyment of the performers.

SINGING

‘Maybe Far Away’ was delivered with a strong attack and good accent and the singing well pitched and good holding of notes (and my notes already say ‘is mic-ing a bit loud?’). The following number with the Orphans ‘It’s a Hard Knock Life’ was

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projected with good pitch and a fine energy by the excellent Orphans. The delivery of 'Tomorrow' was very confident, but with such an accomplished young performer more feeling for the words and modulation could have been encouraged, rather than a reliance on 'belting' the number out. 'We'd Like to Thank You' from the Hooverites was given a strong choral input but again some vocal modulation would have given an extra quality to the fine projection. Miss Hannigan and 'Little Girls' was well characterised and a fine reaching of notes but a vibrato did mean that at times diction was blurred. "We'd Like to Thank You' a little overpowered by Annie input but well characterised, and with a fine soft vocality from Grace with a little insecurity with pitch, and supportive choral input from the Servants. 'NYC' with very fine input from Warbucks – well pitched and excellent diction and good musicality with modulation and feeling for the lyric, New Yorkers held line of singing well. The following 'Easy Street' again some 'swallowing' of words with vibrato from Miss Hannigan – but good characterisation, and a fine input by Rooster with good musicality. 'You Won't be an Orphan For Long' given a fine vocal and musical input by Warbucks, a little insecurity of pitch from the chorus, and unfortunately more vocal overpowering from Annie – the mic-ing was like Karaoke for the ending.

Act 2 with 'You're Never Fully Dressed' was delivered with an excellent sense of period style and well pitched by Bert – Boylan Sisters a little weak, but some good input from the Studio Crew. 'Fully Dressed' from the Orphans lovely input by all and strong singing. The following 'Tomorrow' again became belted out, but with some animation from the chorus. Warbucks nicely lyrical and well characterised input into 'Something Was Missing' – a well motivated number with feeling and again with 'I Don't Need Anything But You'. 'New Deal For Christmas' came over well with some strong choral input.

The genre of the Musical is difficult, and the characterisation and feeling for the mood of the song is all important – it is usual to mic up everyone to give added vocal volume (except I am glad to say with G&S and Opera), but this does compound problems if sensitivity and modulation is not encouraged during rehearsal, and the overall effect can be a constant harsh projection of sound.

ACTING

ANNIE – A visually sweet projection of Annie and with an excellent 'bobbed' hair style rather than the over large head of red curls so often seen. A good accent and clear delivery of the dialogue, and an intelligent grasp of characterisation. The young performer has an excellent potential but great care has to be taken of the strong singing voice – there is a difference in training for Pop and Musical – and a young voice can easily become strained through incorrect training. Throughout Annie related well with Warbucks particularly when he told her of his background.

MISS HANNIGAN – A good accent and a strong presence with excellent body language and gesture. I felt that the comedy aspect of Miss Hannigan could have been further projected – she is a drunk and could become sharp and nasty under the influence and also

could weave around in an outrageous manner and have much bigger reactions – she used her voice too ‘kindly’. Lovely piece listening to the Radio in Act 1, and again a good reaction to being ‘found out’ in the final scene.

BUNDLES – Another good accent and fine timing and cueing with his scene with Miss Hannigan. A realistic performance.

Lt WARD – He had a good accent and strong body language which projected authority, and I appreciated the way in which he accented certain key words in his dialogue. He made strong exits and entrances and was convincing throughout.

SOPHIE – Good use of gesture and accent. Her body language and sense of comedy made this a fine characterisation and all well projected.

GRACE – A good efficiency was projected with her fine body language and movement. Strong vocal projection of the dialogue. Although her singing was a little insecure, the character was never lost, and again good exits and entrances in brisk style.

OLIVER WARBUCKS – A fine stage presence combined with good accent and body language – this was a well motivated performance in all aspects and I appreciated his authority. Good timing over the ‘Mona Lisa’ comment and lovely delivery of “Orphans are boys!”. Throughout he moved from dialogue to song with motivation and awareness of mood and a strong performance in all aspects.

ROOSTER HANNIGAN – He looked the conman and his body language reflected this character. His impact could have been stronger if the cueing between him, Lily and Miss Hannigan had been quicker and sharper at their first meeting. A good scene as the false parents “We are your Mum and Dad” was a lovely scene. A good characterisation.

LILY – Again she looked the ‘floozy’ and characterised with a ‘dumb’ voice and body language but could have projected with voice a little stronger. A good supportive performance.

BERT HEALY – This was a fine characterisation of the radio MC and I fully appreciated the sense of 1930’s style of vocality. Lovely ‘use’ of his script. This was an excellent cameo performance.

FRED – Another finely stylised performance and good manipulation of the Ventriloquist Dummy.

FRANKLIN D ROOSEVELT – He looked convincing in the wheelchair and gave a hearty input and with authority and kindness.

THE ORPHANS – They were excellent – all of them. Lovely input of MOLLY and also DUFFY well characterised – but all were first class and they worked so well together and reacted to all with naturalness and conviction. Congratulations on excellent teamwork.

WARBUCKS STAFF – Maids with good stance and sense of style. The Butler DRAKE was not quite as formal and correct with stance as expected, but there was a kindness and consideration which won me over.

WHITE HOUSE STAFF – All projected well with dialogue and the two women projected strongly different characters.

NEW YORKERS/HOOVERITES – All worked well as teams and kept their individual characters with strength and conviction. The APPLE WOMAN had a strong voice and made an immediate impact. A well projected input all round.

CHORUS WORK

The chorus work of the Orphans was excellent and their song and dance routines were projected with character, style and great strength – congratulations again. The Hooverites/New Yorkers again good performance skills and well projected singing and movement. It was a pity that the adult chorus were not a little stronger with harmony and pitch but the overall made a good impact and with a fine sense of style and atmosphere.

CHOREOGRAPHY & MOVEMENT

There were some well conceived pieces of choreography but unfortunately due to the very limited acting area, there were a lot of straight lines and effective groupings were difficult. The routine for 'It's a Hard Knock Life' was excellent and very well executed by the Orphans. It was a pity that again straight lines for 'We'd Like To Thank You' – they could have been in two groups to make it more interesting. A good routine for "Fully Dressed" with the Orphans who danced excellently with good energy and technique. A good routine for Annie and Warbucks. Nice grouping for the Servants when all frozen in 'You Won't Be An Orphan for Long'. Another excellent input from Orphans with good stage business and dance routine in 'Fully Dressed', and effective grouping for 'New Deal for Christmas'. A fine input on a very limited space.

ORCHESTRA

A good combination of instruments with good Keyboard input throughout. The Overture had a good pace of delivery but dominated by the Percussion. Throughout I appreciated the Keyboard underscoring particularly during the long scene changes. At times the drumming was very loud and again I wondered about the levels of mic-ing. A supportive input but which needed volume modulation at times.

COSTUMES & MAKE-UP

This was excellent. I appreciated the Orphans with a mixture of 'old' clothing – so often they are uniformly clean and cute which is not the correct impression of Miss Hannigan's establishment. Annie always looked good and with some nice costume changes after she was looked after by Warbucks. Throughout excellent re-creation of '30's style and particularly Grace with her many smart changes. Miss Hannigan looked very smart – I did wonder if a bit too groomed, and Lily was perfectly 'tarty'. The 3 Singers in the studio were excellently costumed as all the Whitehouse staff – and the Warbucks staff looked super. Male costuming was equally excellent, and all the street people again well conceived and a good visual presentation. As mentioned I liked Annie's straight bob until she had the curls for the end. All hair styles were in period and make-up excellent and in character. Congratulations on such thoughtful input.

LIGHTING

Again a limited Rig but it was used very effectively with good bright overall lighting and with blues on the cyc and use of gobos. Lovely use of blue on cyc and gold on the homeless in Hooverville. Good use of spot particularly on Annie coming down the stairs in the final scene. A fine input with limited resources.

SET(S)

As mentioned under Production, the Set was too clumsy for the small stage and often the pieces were badly painted. One excellent scene was the Bridge piece in Hooverville and it was well presented. The constant re-arranging of the poorly conceived flats hampered the flow and pace of the production. It is difficult on such a small stage – but with some careful thought a composite set with levels perhaps could have been constructed, and then with use of Cloths (if possible to fly or draw) different locations could have been established.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Again this goes in with Set, and Set changing was slow and laborious. I felt that at times perhaps some of the Cast could have discreetly put pieces on and off to ensure swifter changes. There must have been excellent organisation backstage with the large cast to get on and off. I was concerned with the technical aspect of the sound reproduction – musically and vocally – it created loud and harsh sounds which dominated. It is easy for me to comment and I do realise that the vagaries of technical equipment cannot always be controlled.

Thank you for an excellent evening and I congratulate the Company on tackling a difficult Show on such a small stage and I am sure with a very small Budget. Your audience appreciated your efforts very much and the Company dedication and enjoyment was very obvious.