



Society : GLOC Musical Theatre
Production : Hello Dolly
Date : 23rd May 2009
Venue : Questors Theatre, Ealing
Report by : Sam Webb

Report

Jerry Herman: not the most highbrow, but without a doubt one of the most enjoyable and pleasurable composers in the world of musical theatre. GLOC Musical Theatre's production of Hello Dolly was presented with professionalism and the energy required to lift the audiences spirits up and keep them there to very the end.

A jerky start to the show, with the audience in darkness for 4 seconds before the overture, I'm being picky, but a good pace to the start of a show sets the standard; left in the dark during the well played overture. It would have been nice to give the overture some life, whether a change of light or some movement, this would illuminate our initial experience of the performance. The orchestra, synchronised beautifully, was led by the talented **Ken Williams** (assisted musically by performer Sara Brooks). The music was of course aided hugely by the excellent sound (thanks to **Richard Elliot**), I did feel however that the music, at times, lacked volume. During some of the songs we could hear the feet on the stage floor rather than the superb sounds of the orchestra.

The projections at the back, added a period feel to the presentation, the pictures were relative and appropriate. They offered a contrast in colouration to the stage, which was lit up with costumes. Perhaps there was room for further expansion in this technique. When the band marched in front of the projection, it was static, if the imaged had moved to the right, with the band marching in the opposite direction, further dimension and life could have been added.

Generally the movement of set was conducted with speed and skill, when the sofa was taken off in Act 1, too much of the audiences' focus wandered to the move, I would ask for a slicker transition of this particular change.

Dolly was executed with an ease of style and glamour as **Karen Anstiss** entered the stage into a well crafted pool of light. The performance by Karen was slick and clear. She was well defined in both dialogue and singing. I feel, however, that the portrayal of Dolly needed further guts and gusto in its presentation. Showing more power in her presence and further excitement in her dialogue would have added a deeper dimension to the role and meaning to the character. Diction was good, we didn't miss a word, but some of the lines that required comedy emphasis were thrown away and the significance of the comedy was missed. The audience however emphasised with Dolly and enjoyed the performance. **Paul Aylett** playing Mr Ambrose Kempner was confident in his portrayal, making his awareness of the space clear, perhaps an awareness of the character's pace of vocal delivery would have added further clarity to the depiction. **Becky Crockford** played the emotional Miss Ermengarde exceptionally, it was such a shame the first moment where we realised what a whinger she was, wasn't defined clearer, I wanted her

to stop centre stage to emphasise her intentions and motivations of the character. Another talented young lady was **Lorraine Wright** who despite being one of the younger performers displayed maturity and confidence in her presentation of Minnie Fay.

Nick King showing comedy awareness with his Drum entry, playing the scene with a commitment to his character and comedy timing. The strength of the character was continuous throughout. **Colin Smith** used his usual charm and talent to win the audience, and win them he did after his first few lines with an impeccable presence, a talented singing voice and that cheeky smile making his interpretation of Mr Cornelium one which resounded with the audience. Playing opposite was **Matt Marchant** also having his fair share of talent and character displaying a disciplined performance in the role as Mr Barnaby Tucker.

Karen Benny as Irene Molloy played with clear diction and professional interaction between the other cast members and able to cover well when her headwear fell off. Another good performance from **Dawn Slaughter**, confident in her dialogue and a good presence on stage but I felt her grasp of the accent was a little loose. **David Smith** showed a brilliant presence in his scene, playing with honesty and good use of volume.

The drinking of vino wasn't the only whining happening in the restaurant, **Linda Kinghorn** as Miss Ernestina Money whined with true professionalism. However I did notice that the wine was white, but came from a red bottle. (I miss nothing!)

Into the courtroom, with **Sam Thomas** playing with perfect characterisation of a judge, it was unfortunate that due to his position we missed much of his facial expression, but his posture was clear. A further input of comedy into the text would have made the scene even more dynamic. With no ascension in his position perhaps Judge could have turned to face the audience, or been placed upstage of them, the audience would just have had to imagine that he was in front of the jury and convicts. Dolly's final address was accurate and finished the well-rounded show off with a slick and immaculate commentary, and to top this the bows were some of the cleanest I have seen in Amateur Dramatics, many companies ignore this vital part of the show so congratulations to you for remembering it!

The beautiful pristine and neat costumes were worn with pride by the ensemble, and despite corsets and petticoats, many of the dancers were dynamic in their movement and displayed capability in their presentation. Good motifs were displayed; carried out well and despite being on a relatively small stage the group moved around it with good spatial awareness. The choreography at the beginning was simple with leans and turns but they created some attractive shapes on the stage, the dancing then became more complex with individuals taking on solo dances roles, in particular into 'Put on your Sunday clothes', and then by the end of that particular number the entire cast were committed to a wonderfully choreographed ensemble of movement culminating in a fully shaped train (complete with wheels, made from umbrellas) in the centre of the Questors stage. Congratulations to **Sian Bowles-Bevan** and **Martin Wilcox** (assisted by Paul Aylett) for daring to put such innovative choreography into your presentation. I noted many times the characters of the chorus, whether it was in 'your Sunday clothes', as the band or as waiters, were fully committed to their characterisation from the moment they came on to when they had disappeared into the wings. The singing of the ensemble

was also clear: always heard and with some nicely crafted harmonies adding further to the professionalism of the piece.

How could I go any further without mentioning the incredible cast members who featured in the *Waiter Gallop*, a scene sometimes missed by companies, but not yours! You professionally pulled off a scene, which was in sync and executed with tension and dynamics throughout. In smart outfits the group of players danced ballet-like using a complex array of moves and levels with trays, glasses and food. Comedy and characterisation wasn't missed throughout the dancing either as the full cast gave their selves wholly to it. This part of the show was the jewel in the crown topped off by the circular movement where you literally whisked the girls off their feet, as I'm sure you did the audience too. At all times the entire cast, working as a true ensemble held their pauses so the audience could indulge in a well deserved round of applause.

The lighting (provided by **Pete Balls**) in the production was, for the majority clean and neat, with effective use of specials, as previously mentioned nice use of colour mixed throughout, all which complimented the production and generally had been created well for the space. I noted an imbalance of floor light in 'It takes a woman' however the clearly executed choreography aided our interpretation of the number. I also wanted more elegant lighting in 'elegance'; perhaps some movers or some birdies would have created this aesthetic. There was some innovative use of light; in Act 2 there was an effective use of side lighting.

Congratulations to your costume department, I was very impressed with the quality and variety of the costumes, I felt at times that it may have been beneficial to pin down the sashes as their movement caused a distraction. Congratulations also to **Stephen Parfitt** for bringing all the technical elements together. Also to all those who if I mentioned, this report would be nearing a dissertation, including all those involved with publicity, make-up, programme, café and front of house.

Working for the first time as Director for *GLOC* at Questors, **Martin Wilcox** had his work cut out, it can't be an easy space to work in but his presentation showed effortlessness, there were a few moments where I felt the action could have moved further Down Stage as at time I felt too distanced from the action. Also from where I was sitting some action was blocked by a group of chorus members, however these are minor issues compared to the overall product of the performance. I hope you understand most of the criticisms in this report were mainly minor issues and hopefully elements you will be able to reflect on. Do let me know if anything is unfair or if you feel I am being too nice. Huge congratulations to Martin and the entire cast for a production I could describe as one of the best-presented amateur musical performances I have seen this year. Im looking forward to the next one already.

Sam Webb

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