

## **NODA South West - Review: Tuesday 17th April 2018**

In April I was privileged to be invited to see Glastonbury and Street Musical Society's production of Barry Manilow's Copacabana. As a rep I have the wonderful opportunity of being invited to see many different productions and occasionally, as with this one, I get invited to see a show that not only have I not seen but, embarrassingly, know nothing about!

The play is based on one of Barry Manilow's most famous, Non-Amanda based, songs and follows the story of struggling actress Lola who finds employment at The Copacabana and love in the guise of Tony. This new found love and employment is threatened by the arrival of Rico and his long suffering partner Conchita and, just in case the story wasn't complicated, it's all in the imagination of Stephen a struggling song writer.

Unsurprisingly, the strongest song in the whole show is Copacabana with the other songs paling somewhat in comparison, although "Man Wanted" and "Who Am I Kidding" offered some comic fun.

The curtains on the production opened early, allowing the audience an early glimpse of the stage. I always like productions that open the curtains early as it gives the audience a perfect opportunity to have a nose at the set before the show starts, and what a clever set it was. Basically a very simple set with two sets of stairs either side of a walkway, over a glass panel with the band clearly on show behind and, apart from the introduction of a large projection wall at the rear, that was it! I was a bit concerned when I saw the projection wall as I am still unsure if I think they are a good thing or not. However, here it was not only a good thing but an incredibly essential piece of the stage. With at least 8 different scenes, this production really benefitted from the quick scene changes that having the screen allowed and it was used incredibly well. Overall, the simplistic set just looked fantastic, a massive well done to Bright Production Services Ltd and of course Will Taylor and Laura Grace for the amazing animation that was on the projection wall.

The sound and the lighting for this production was expertly handled and, apart from a few crackles during one of the scenes, there were no problems at all. The sound was crisp and clear and the lighting was beautifully done and worked well with the staging to produce a real nightclub style effect.

The costumes were superb and looked great, especially in the nightclub dancing scenes when everyone was dressed the same. Again the effect here really helped give the impression of a 1940s style nightclub. With so many dancers and so many costume changes it must have been a nightmare to keep everything moving along smoothly so massive congratulations to Di Gifford, Sarah Neale and Liz Bradwell.

The songs were all beautifully sung and impressively performed in full American accent, not always an easy trick to pull off. The orchestra, under the control of Luke Holman, were great and managed to produce a real solid sound without overpowering the singers on the stage.

The choreography by Sarah Neale was very good throughout the evening, especially during the nightclub scene when the nightclub dancers were putting on their show.

During my reviews, I normally like to give credit to any chorus/ensemble members that I felt stood out from the crowd. In this production there were a couple of the ladies that really stood out for me but unfortunately, the pictures in the programme are so small, I found it impossible to pick them out.

The casting for this production was spot on and James Newton and Jess Russell, easily carried the production as the two leads. They acted so well together, that I had to check the programme to see if they were an actual couple! Elspeth Salmon and Anna Gifford were physically unrecognisable in their roles as Gladys and Conchita and both had some great comic moments that showed they both really understand how to play comedy. Both these ladies also had to overcome some very strong accents, which they managed well without any "Somerset"

accidentally slipping in, although I did find Gladys' accent and mannerisms a little over the top. Matthew Maisey was, as usual, on top form as Rico and made a very likeable baddie. It always amazes me that Matthew can play so many different types of role with ease and it must be a director's dream having him in the cast. Normally, a performance like Matthew's would have been more than enough to crown him the star performer but this time he was just outshone by a fantastic performance by, relative newcomer, Matt Turner in the role of Sam. Matt played his part so well and managed to balance humour, intimidation and sadness with perfection, his performance in the song "Who Am I Kidding" was the comedic highlight of the night, as was his "realistic" wig.

Overall, even though I didn't enjoy the show as much as I hoped I would, I really enjoyed your production of it. Your production was slick, smooth and very stylish and the use of the projection wall really benefitted the production, it is great to see modern technology being used in this way. Thank you very much for inviting me and I look forward to visiting you guys soon.

Leigh Conley, SW Regional Representative District 8