

## **ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION**

Name of Society: GLASTONBURY & STREET MUSICAL COMEDY SOCIETY

Name of Production: 'COPACABANA'

by Barry Manilow

Date: 19TH April 2018

Venue: Strode College, Street

Adjudicator: Claire Morris

Copacabana, the 1994 musical, is as knowingly cheesy and outrageous as the Barry Manilow hit on which it is based. It is the song Copacabana which ambitious New York songwriter Stephen is attempting to write on the night of his fifth wedding anniversary, much to his wife Samantha's despair. He has his head in the music while she is desperately getting ready for a night out. This framing narrative soon fades, without totally disappearing from view, as Stephen becomes immersed in the creative process. Out from behind the gauze step the Copacabana showgirls in all their feathery glory; fresh from Oklahoma comes the lovely Lola La Mar; and Stephen himself slips on the mantle of Tony, a singer at Manhattan's world-famous Copacabana club. Illusion is very much the name of the game. We watch as Stephen struggles to write a song about one of his own kind, Tony, who falls head over heels for Lola, newly arrived at the Copacabana Club. When Lola is drugged and kidnapped by Rico, the wicked owner of Havana's Tropicana Club, Tony and the rest of the gang go galloping to the rescue. The adventures completed, the songwriter realises he has been really writing a love story based on his own wife.

### **PRESENTATION**

Clever use was made of the stage where action effectively took place throughout on two different levels, the upper stage being accessed by metal stairs and rails incorporated into the set, and we could pleasingly see the orchestra too. This allowed for good flexibility to move from different settings such as Grand Central Station to The Copa, Stephen's Studio to the Tropicana Stage and allowed for a good flow to the production. Using the backdrop and proscenium arch for projection, and occasional entrances/exits through the audience really maximized the space and embrace the audience.

### **MUSIC**

I loved the fact that the orchestra were actually on stage and thus an integral part of the production, as they should be. The musical numbers in Copacabana are a real mix, including soft love songs, Latin and bolero numbers. This gave the orchestra a chance to demonstrate their talent and expertise in all sorts of areas, which they most certainly did. The sound was always well balanced with accurate timing and we heard some powerful brass and percussion, beautifully offset by empathic keyboard and supported by the drums, bass and reeds.

### **DIRECTION**

This is a musical which contains not only different emotional themes, but ones which are encapsulated across different countries and in different eras. All this needs to be taken into account as the audience are swept from New York to Hawaii. Pacing is really important for this to work well, and indeed there was a swift, not rushed pace, maintained throughout. The energy and dazzle factor were larger than life and vibrancy was the order of the evening. I really felt that this was a Broadway Musical rather than a West End Production, and completely fitting that it was.

### **CHOREOGRAPHY**

Professional and slick choreography was obviously the result of some very hard work by all. Dance played a large and vital part of the show and included some spectacular dance routines with a strong element of glamour. The dances were well synchronized and often expertly performed. I loved the fact that members of the chorus appeared to be a variety of shapes, sizes and ages – and each and everyone held their own with deserved acclaim.

### **MAKE UP AND COSTUMES/PROPS**

Plenty of colour, fur, feathers, glitz and sparkles! Great costumes making loud and clear

statements. I have no idea how many costumes we saw in the one evening but I do know that I was mesmerized at the speed in which they happened, and the variety that they were. They seemed particularly effective after the opening scene in which Stephen and Samantha were in simple bathrobes. But not for long! It would be hard to highlight any particular ones, but the opening number for Act Two with Conchita and the ladies in stunning black and gold was certainly one of my favourites. Make-up was excellent – under and overstated as required and it was very refreshing to see that the chorus had hair kept well back from their faces which meant we could enjoy seeing full facial features. An acknowledgement to the many props which were in keeping with the various eras and locations.

#### TECHNICAL EFFECTS

The technical side of this production really enhanced the overall visuality of this show. Lighting was used effectively for both mood evocation and in the use of spots for some musical numbers, and the sound too was professionally maintained throughout. Outstanding videography and animation really added an extra touch of wow factor, cleverly matching the moment on stage with the screen in perfect synchronization.

#### PERFORMERS

##### STEPHEN /TONY

The young songwriter, who doubles as Tony in 1947, and we could quite believe that your musical creativity meant that your attention to your marriage was wandering. You also played a convincing struggling songwriter by day, working by night at the Copacabana. A really melodic and powerful singing voice and you shared with us the way in which your love for Lola progressed. You touched us at the end though when you realized that Samantha was your real, present-day love.

##### SAMANTHA/LOLA

Stephen's wife, who doubles as Lola Lamar in 1947. You swiftly turned from a rather tolerant, but exasperated, housewife to a young girl with misguided ambitions to become a Broadway star. As the newly arrived Lola fresh off the train and with a stunning performance with the cast of *Just Arrived*, we immediately knew that despite your feistiness and self-assuredness you were really very naïve to this new world and were bound to make all sorts of mistakes. Which of course is just what happened. A believable performance with an excellent singing voice – you and Tony made a great pair.

##### GLADYS/MUM

The cheeky, warm-hearted cigarette girl at the Copacabana, always ready with the wise cracks and with a personality larger than life, like her heart. You treated everyone the same, airs and graces or wealth were really not important to you at all. Tremendous stage presence and comic timing backed up by wonderful body language and facial expressions. You really came into your own with *Copa Girl* with the voice and dance skills to show Lola just how it should be done. Great performance.

##### SAM/DAD

There was something rather vulnerable about you – the gruff but kind manager of the Copacabana. It was clear when you first appeared that you were in a bad mood and in a gentle comedic way you maintained an air of finding the world a rather complex place. Whilst you tried to keep an air of authority it was very obvious that you were not the one ruling the roost in the Copacabana!

##### RICO CASTELLI

The atmosphere on stage changed when you made your appearance. You truly were the villain of the evening. The elegant but dangerous gangster who would let nothing stop in his way – whatever/whoever you liked the look of, you were determined to own. You concealed drugs in your ring and saw nothing wrong in treating your lady so badly, including slapping her, when you set eyes on someone you found more appealing. Such a cruel and nasty man – very well portrayed and we didn't like you one bit!

#### CONCHITA ALVAREZ

A truly Latin bombshell of the first order as Rico's long-suffering girlfriend. You may have been ageing but the energy that you exuded was tremendous and your portrayal balanced well the mesmerizing skills and talents of your professional singing and dancing with the pathos of your situation at understanding that you were being replaced. You loved your man but in the end knew that he was not a good one, and that it was time you protected anyone else likely to fall prey to him.

#### MCMANUS

The New York cop (of obvious Irish descent) not to be reckoned with. You looked out for Sam but didn't want anyone trying to rescue Lola – you really believed that everything should be left up to the cops and no-one else.

#### WILLIE

More than just a waiter at the Copacabana, you took your job very seriously. Your no-nonsense character didn't take to Lola at first, but in the end you were charmed by her and ended up being harmed in trying to save her

#### CARLOS/LUIS

You gave good supporting roles as a Tropicana performer and of course as Rico's enforcer and bodyguard where you gave menacing looks and seemed a force not to be reckoned with!

#### MAITRE D'/SKIP

Another good supporting role as both the house choreographer and the rather snooty Headwaiter/host of the Copacabana.

#### CHORUS

Stirling team work as performers, dancers, singers and guests at the Copa and the Tropicana – not forgetting Auditionees, Pirates, Pirettes, Cops, Waiters and other assorted roles!

**I have to confess that this was my first exposure to Copacabana, and what an exposure it was! A really invigorating, creative and energetic musical performed by some seriously talented singers and dancers. We could sense the fun and the strong teamwork behind the production.**

Thank you for your kind hospitality and for ensuring I had a copy beforehand. I wish you further success with your next production.