

CAMUS – 'OKLAHOMA!'

NOVEMBER 2013

This musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein's first, is one of the finest collaborations ever and resulted in a magnificent score bursting with vitality that changed the direction of musical comedy forever. There is a richness of texture and contrast from the opening 'Oh what a beautiful morning' through a succession of hit songs to the rousing finale 'Oklahoma!' that ensure it retains its position high up on the list of the most popular and well-loved musicals.

The overture was superbly played. You are fortunate to be able to have a good number of musicians in the orchestra as the sound they make really adds to the overall presentation and 'professionalism' of a production.

Scenic Projects scenery at the opening was simple but effective and the properties used were in keeping with the period. Jud's cabin was good and the atmospheric lighting cast large shadows adding to the menacing feel of the place. The trucks converted easily and quickly for the change of scene and the back stage crew worked quietly and efficiently. Props were appropriate.

Nick Williams sang the opening number confidently and his accent, which admittedly needed tuning in to, was good. It would be difficult for him not to have a presence on the stage, given his height, but it wasn't just his stature, he had a very natural acting style and pleasant demeanour.

The different facets of Aunt Eller's character were clearly displayed by Lynne Clegg. She was protective and encouraging with Laurey but a brusque, no-nonsense woman with the fellows. She held command in the box social scene when the tension was almost palpable.

Generally the main female role in a musical is the gentler, rather lightweight one, and Rebeca Rogers' slight figure added to her vulnerability in the role of Laurey. She also showed us the spirited side of her personality and both her acting and singing were very good. She did have a tendency to drop her voice occasionally, which sometimes made it difficult to hear her dialogue.

The character that is the most fun to play and the one that the audience really enjoy is Ado Annie. She's the girl who gets the laughs and Laura Thomas was classic. Ditzzy, irreverent and superficial but all done in a delightful way. She was bursting with

an energy that never waned and, despite her being so much taller than Will, the pairing worked.

James Palmer was totally at ease as Will and despite awaiting another operation his movements were fluid and controlled. He gave his usual strong performance and pointedly brought out the comedy of the situation.

Paul Gibson certainly looked the part and his Middle -Eastern accent, not an easy one to emulate, was fairly convincing. As Ali Hakim he put across 'It's a Scandal It's an Outrage' with enthusiasm and his acting was sound.

Jud Fry is the man whom everyone dislikes. He is totally without social skills, and on top of that, a lecher. His appearance should be as undesirable as he himself is, but Martin Sampson looked rather wholesome and not at all repugnant. Despite that he put across the despised character very well and his singing, as always, was secure. At the box social I actually felt sorry for him; that scene was brilliantly acted by all involved.

Choreography was good and company numbers were energetic and very well executed by the cast. The dream ballet was superb. I particularly liked the doll-like saloon girls with their robotic movements, and the fact that you were able to use the existing cast rather than bring in dancers to perform the ballet was a bonus. It was a dramatic scene and beautifully performed.

'The Farmer and the Cowman' was full of vitality - a really rousing number as was the fabulous finale of 'Oklahoma!'

Either David Maine (Andrew Carnes) or Tom Knight (Slim) had a lovely singing voice but no American accent. Unfortunately I didn't make clear in my notes which one it was, (apologies for that) and I noted that the other man had a good accent but was less strong in the vocals. Hopefully you will be able to draw a conclusion from my description.

All the other named parts added to the success of the production, as did the chorus who were particularly well rehearsed in both the music and the dancing. Michele Zeman performed her first principal role with vivacity.

Lighting was good as was the sound except in 'Many a New Day' when there was some interference.

Costumes were suitable and hairstyles suited the era. Maybe Ali Hakim was a little smart for a pedlar but then perhaps he was good at peddling!

There were rather more children than I've seen before in 'Oklahoma!' possibly because you have been nurturing a future generation of performers in the last few shows, and also the undoubted benefit they have as far as ticket sales are concerned!

My congratulations to the production team of Sue, Richard and Dawn on presenting such an enjoyable and polished show. The whole audience joined in the finale and as for me I was mouthing if not singing quietly in every single number.

Thank you for inviting me to see the musical and for the hospitality shown to me on the evening.

E. Gloria Smith

N.O.D.A. South East Regional Representative – District 12