



Society : Bishopshalt Operatic & Dramatic Society
Production : "9-to5 The Musical"
Date : 4th December 2021
Venue : Bishopshalt School
Report by : C Baynes on behalf of Tony Austin

NODA – Be inspired by Amateur Theatre

I am delighted that I had this opportunity to see BODS in action – Tony’s misfortune was my fortune! It was a lovely reminder that amateur theatre is thriving amongst the younger generation and I do hope that this passion stays with them all long into their adult life. For the first ‘out of lockdown’ production they chose the uplifting, fun-packed tale of girl power – “9-to5 The Musical” – music and lyrics by Dolly Parton and book by Patricia Resnick. If, by the remotest of chances, we should forget Dolly’s association with this musical “she is there to remind us” –topping and tailing the production. It is somewhat surprising that it took more than thirty years for her to make that leap from movie to musical. Thankfully the score is classic Dolly Parton. When I first saw the show a few years ago I did not really like the pre-recorded involvement Dolly has but here at BODS’ production I found it set the mood beautifully. Perhaps it was the way it was displayed – projected full height upstage left with clear vocal reception. A few moments later it became clear we were in for a glitzy, entertaining, downtown, totally absurd, absolutely brilliant, romp.

The opening song is, the already popular, “9-to-5” and involves the full company of nearly forty keen, talented, committed youngsters all taking part in a well choreographed and well executed dance routine whilst singing out loud and clear leaving us in no doubt that we were in for a treat. Your directors **Nicole Burman & Kim Coles** must have been very pleased and proud to see their vision come to life so successfully. It must be rewarding to work with such a talented, enthusiastic team of players (probably exhausting too!) When a film is converted to the stage it is frequently necessary to be very creative with the myriad of locations required. The directors cleverly used designated areas of the stage, back projections and furniture (mainly rows of chairs) to represent the changes of scene. (It was surprising how effective just draping the chair-rows with coloured throws was, giving the office that “woman’s touch”.) Having such a big cast could have caused logistic problems on stage but the disciplined organised group entrances and exits were nicely in place and ensured that the flow of people off and on stage was smooth. It was important that the directors’ interpretation of the underlying theme of sexism and misogyny was dealt with in a suitably light – tongue-in-cheek – pantomime way so that it became the show celebrating female empowerment that it should be. Well done.

Your choreographer **Jane Gooch** was a busy lady. Her clever dance creations appeared regularly throughout this show. The brilliant routines were so well rehearsed and performed and it was obvious that the cast enjoyed dancing them as they were all smiles and looked fully at ease with what they were doing – boys and girls alike. There were about a dozen girls that performed slightly more complicated numbers like the tap dance that replicated the typewriter sounds so well – nicely done. The dance the boys performed in Hart’s number “Here for You” was suitably suggestive without being crude and exhibited the boys’ acrobatic and rhythmic abilities. The girls’ numbers describing how they would like to ‘extinguish’ Hart gave an opportunity for some different dance styles –street dance, hoe-down and ballet. Ms Gooch did you all proud.

The Musical Director, **Minesh Shah-Sylvester**, brilliantly controlled this large company and his melodious band. The balance, to me, seemed perfect throughout. The cast were well drilled and sang tunefully with verve and vigour. The cast all followed Mr Shah-Sylvester via the tannoy well and despite the large number on stage there were no timing issues. I felt that it was rather a shame that there was no decent length orchestral piece so that we could have heard the band properly as they were making some lovely music. I particularly appreciated the accompaniment to Judy's anthem "Get Out & Stay Out" – part of it sounded familiar but I couldn't place it – lovely. Well done to all the musicians in the team.

I believe that Tony will be mentioning other 'creatives' but I would like to say that I very much appreciated all the various disciplines involved in putting the show together – and just want to add that I particularly admired all the period costumes so reminiscent of the times and the 'black and red theme' was very effective – well done **Kerry Magee**.

The storyline concerns mainly three woman office workers planning their revenge on their corrupt, sexist, predatory boss Franklin Hart. His second in command Violet – or rather the one doing all the work but getting none of the recognition - accidentally 'sweetens' his coffee with rat poison. Mayhem ensues when she realises what she has done. Mabel Ellingham was to have played this role but unfortunately just a couple of days before 'curtain up' she is found to be Covid positive. After considering their options the team decided to go ahead with **Eva Rigby** taking on the role. Eva did a magnificent job – she acted, sang and danced the role barely putting a foot wrong – as though she had been doing it for weeks. She must have been a little nervous but it certainly didn't show. She took command of the stage on her opening number "Around Here". She even seemed to really enjoy the finale of Act 1 with "Shine like the Sun" – a great number. Her big number in Act 2 "One of the Boys!" Was well sung and danced, a performance that showed that, like the character she was playing, she was gaining confidence all the time. Congratulations.

Emma Delaney played the role of Dolly Parton – sorry Doralee Rhodes – brilliantly. Emma took on this (not-so) dumb sexy blonde character for the whole evening – never switching off – her constantly cheery nature and smiley face 'shone like the sun!' Her naivety was also evident particularly in her first scene with Hart. The heartfelt number "Backwoods Barbie" was well sung and performed – she nicely brought out the poignancy as she relates how her appearance belies her true personality. I also loved the fantasy hoe-down number "Cowgirl's Revenge" –great fun. Emma managed to do the whole show in those killer-heels – which is an achievement in itself - and cleverly retained that Southern drawl throughout. A very entertaining performance – well done.

The third member of the sisterhood was Judy Bernly – a new recruit to the business – she is trying to re-invent herself after being deserted by her husband - who left her for a younger woman?! To begin with this character is rather inept as she tries to master the office techniques with typewriter and malevolent photocopier. This character was well played by **Natalie Young** who had a great sense of the absurd – her farcical antics were evident on several occasions – cleverly she performed these very naturally – not for laughs. Natalie sung all her numbers powerfully and with confidence and passion – particularly so in "The Dance of Death" (where her outstanding dancing ability was also demonstrated) and in her great anthem "Get Out & Stay Out" (when she sent her wayward 'ex' on his way with great conviction). Here is another very talented young lady taking charge of the stage brilliantly.

With these three women on his case Hart didn't really stand a chance! **Ishan Tamber**, an experienced performer, had the unenviable task of playing Franklin Hart Junior the corrupt lecherous, chauvinistic boss. Ishan slightly caricatured the part playing him with conviction – making him the classic pantomime villain and thereby dealing with the uncomfortable sleaziness of the role. His only numbers had discomfiting themes but nevertheless he sang them well putting his heart and soul into them – making them entertaining in “Carry-On” style. This was an excellent all round performance.

Hart's loyal secretary Roz Keith held hidden feelings for her boss and acts as the company spy for him. This role was skilfully played by another very talented performer **Erin O'Connor-Kelly**. Erin's lovely rich, singing voice and her mischievous personality made her number “Heart to Hart” one of the highlights of the evening. Initially presenting as a prim spinster who takes great care of her boss, Roz reveals- in this number -that she has hidden depths and lustful desires. This was an entertaining routine done very well by Erin and the dancing girls.

Joshua Charles-Hatton played the part of the young accountant with a penchant for Violet. This was a genuine heartfelt performance eventually getting through to Violet when they sing the duet “Let Love Grow” in Act 2. Well done.

There were many other smaller roles all of which were well acted and it was clear that they were all very capable performers. **Ace Holding** took on the role of the Chairman of the Board, Tinsworthy. This actor had a great sense of humour and good comic timing. He ‘sized-up’ Hart despite the protestations and he cleverly sends him off to a remote office leaving Violet and her team, in charge – nicely done. **Simeon Young**, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye gave a very credible performance as Violet's son, dancing well in the ensemble numbers. **Rachel Manuel** played the office lush convincingly. Her tuneful singing was evident when she sang solo lines – probably in “Change It” and she danced well in all the ensemble numbers. **Lucy Millard** was cast as Missy – Hart's wife, who obviously led an independent life –perhaps explaining, or a result of, Hart's behaviour. This was a nice little cameo for Lucy whose sparkly personality had been noted in the ensemble song and dance numbers. Judy's husband Dick makes a couple of appearances – one soon after their split and later when he is after reconciliation. **Alannah Dolphin** played this role with confidence and was suitably surprised by the change in Judy's demeanour at the end – when he is told in no uncertain terms to “Get Out & Stay Out”. Several other office workers, policemen, hospital staff had lines to say and all these were credibly performed by **Millie Henderson, Kirsty Love, Keira Saragih, Charlie Moore, Juanita Kyere-Aidoo, Sophie Correia, & Iba Beg**.

Everyone on stage contributed significantly to the success of this production. This of course includes those ensemble members not already mentioned:- **Daniel McAllister, Isabelle Webster, Sion Bolla, Harvey Pounder, Jake White, Isaiah Kyere-Aidoo, Maddie Richards, Olivia Rodriguez-Owens, Kate Lincoln, Ruby Fryer, Gemma Hobdell, Keira Doyle, Madison Brooks-Harte, Daisy Allen, Jaanvi Tanija, Serena Sangsefidi, Madeleine Swan and Isabella Cuncell**. The chorus singing and the excellent ensemble routines were all so very well executed. This demonstrates the wealth of talent there is at BODS – just waiting in the wings to take on larger roles in the future.

BODS' production “9-to-5 The Musical” was a most enjoyable evening's entertainment thanks to the dedication and commitment of everyone involved whether on stage, backstage, technical or creative participants or Front of House. Long may you all continue to enjoy doing what you do so well