



Society : Crowthorne Musical Players
Production : Sister Act
Date : 13-17 March 2018
Venue : South Hill Park
Report by : Susan Boobyer-Pickles

[Show Report](#)

Thank you so much for inviting us to your recent show Sister Act. Currently a very popular piece which suits many large groups due to the emphasis on the female membership although the men do also play an integral role. Being a wonderful feel good show certainly encourages larger audiences and that was so on the night I attended with both balcony's very full even the side elevations. I enjoyed the evening and it was clear that the rest of the audience did too. A crowd puller that did not disappoint on the night.

I was sat in the balcony which I really love as you can look down onto the orchestra and for Sister Act you had an amazingly accomplished dozen. **Mark Webb** assembled some really talented players who together, and under his direction, created a fabulous sound that complimented the voices very well. There were a couple of moments when the music was too loud, for example, during Mother Superiors "I haven't got a prayer"; however largely the band managed to cope with the rocky elements and the more quiet poignant moments that run through the show. Mark had obviously worked hard with the cast to ensure a beautiful sound from the female chorus in their different numbers including really excellent "bad" singing which is probably not that easy to do. Equally enjoyable were all the solo/duets. All I can really say is that it was all great.

While sat in my lovely seat I had the time to peruse the programme which was really well put together by **Peter Winn**. This programme had everything you need to enjoy the show, synopsis, some of the back story, interesting society information and production notes which really highlight the effort that goes into putting on a big musical on a big stage. Last but not least a list of the songs and who is singing them – not everyone will know all the people on stage and its nice to look back and see who was doing what – especially in Sister Act where so many of the cast look exactly the same!. Why not think about entering it for the 2019 award open to all programmes and posters produced in the 2018 calendar year. You can download the entry now from the NODA website – London Region section.

While this production does not require massive dance routines the moving of a large chorus is very important so that the stage does not look a complete mess. Certainly in the routines featuring the nuns the movement was very appropriate to their status and the rock nature of the music. Of course the highlights were the big numbers with some nice expressive "armography" and movement of the nuns through the numbers. Other highlights were the co-ordinated moves for the boys in "When I find my Baby", the 80's disco was hilarious, and "Lady in the Long Black Dress" which was pitched to their strengths. It's always hard to tell if something is Director led or Choreographer led but whichever it was I particularly enjoyed The Chase scene in Act 1. There were also some lovely movements by Deloris in the opening numbers. I think **Erin Hope Pharo** with all her performing and

choreography experience really created a well thought out mix of relatively simple movement which was well drilled and therefore well performed. Good job.

I very much liked **Victoria Spearing's** Stage Design; yes it can be argued that the staircase was a little large, black and domineering but the concept really worked for me and allowed the cast to perform at different levels, it probably helped with entrances and exits, and created interest for the audience. The SM and DSM **Justin Ferrington and Duncan Bruce** managed their team well in the very many scene changes in this production with trucks being used for stand-alone pieces to denote the various locations the black staging being the invisible backdrop. By and large the scene changes were done quickly and slickly although there was a bit of noise at times. Also the use of the cast to move items on and off worked well ensuring some of the more complicated changes were done efficiently. There are quite a lot of props required for Sister Act that your average prop store does not have so well done **Peter Winn** for getting together all the items needed. It was good to see the "real food" it always looks a bit odd when people pretend to eat on stage so have a morsel to nibble on worked. Nothing stood out for the wrong reason so well done to Peter and **Tasha Eden**.

As we arrived into the auditorium there was the usual open stage preset as the club with some great 80's music in the background and the church in the upper levels with projected Gothic windows. A superbly conceived lighting plot from **Michael Brenkley** was atmospheric but not too dark. There were a variety of coloured lights used which really set each scene especially for the major numbers and lovely colour changing floor gobos which from my lofty position really worked extremely well as they moved and changed patterns. I believe a glitter ball was used but it was not clear from the balconies maybe from the stalls it had more effect. Great isolated down spotlighting especially on Mother Superior and Deloris during "Within these Walls". While there was a lot going on it all seemed harmonious and natural. Black outs and cues were generally accurate and the start of each scene very clean. Congratulations to Michael and his operator **Steve Davies**.

Sound and SFX were designed and managed well by **Tom Horrox**. There was a good balance of band and voices although it was a shame there were a few radio mic issues but honestly with so many being used is not surprising. Generally everyone could be heard very well and also the individual lines from the nuns were clear. SFX were well timed especially the gun shot and the bell, and the reverb on Deloris in the convent/church worked well.

So if I am reading the programme right **Janet Winn** and her team actually created all the nuns outfits, if that is correct honestly I take my hat off to you. Hopefully you will be able to hire them out in the future and create some income for your efforts. So I would say that gets you three WOW's at least. Certainly all the clerical costumes looked great, including the silver finale ensemble, and the more modern outfits fitted the bill except I did miss the flouncy sleeves commonly worn by Pablo. I especially liked the outfits chosen for the fantasy dancers. Sometimes it's good to use cast members own wardrobe as a source as generally the fit is good and they can see the character in their minds eye and produce something that they feel comfortable in. I think the outfits chosen ultimately for Deloris, Michelle and Tina worked well at the beginning.

My big issue with the whole show was the night attire worn by the nuns in "Bless our Show" and I am not casting a shadow at Janet's door by any means but I think this is a collective hiccup in what was a

very well directed (by **Matt Thompson**) and produced show. Some of the nightwear was demur but some of it was just too modern and looked out of place especially when the Mother Superior appeared in the scene impeccably dressed and covered from head to toe. For me the idea that the nuns would not have had their heads covered or at least be wearing a scarf to cover their hair was surpassed by the idea that the nuns would sport pigtails and ponytails and jump around like teenagers. The illusion was broken and the final scenes just did not work as well for me. At the end of the day we are all responsible for the outcome of a show and all I would say is that if you see something that does not “feel” right have a quiet word with someone, it might be how they wanted it but it just might be something that has been missed and can be corrected.

I was pleased that the nuns were unadorned by make-up except for anything required for lighting purposed and that Deloris, Tina and Michelle did have a glamorous make-up – it’s not easy to decide when characters double up as nuns but certainly the make-up for Deloris was very nice – well done **Linda Peacock**. All faces and expressions were well seen under the lights.

Deloris van Cartier (Laura Thain)

I was totally convinced by Laura as the energetic Deloris sporting a great costume and fabulous wig right from the start in the nightclub scene to the end finale – we could see the showgirl, streetwise, tough character and I thought the styling, mannerisms and voice was spot on. A wonderful singing voice set the scene in “Take me to Heaven” and “Fabulous Baby” for what was to follow. Deloris really is a marathon of a part and I was pleased to see that Laura hung on to the end and managed to keep the energy at a high level throughout. Laura has a very natural style of acting and movement and especially in the opening there were some lovely gestures which were subtle and sympathetic to the music. My only niggle was the fact that Deloris was still wearing her bangles throughout and I really think these would have been removed. Laura had a good relation with all the cast members especially the Mother Superior and the nun ensemble and was able to show the subtle changes to her character especially in Act two, there was a particularly sweet moment with MS. Good idea to have the off stage singing to mask the costume change?

Amy Williams and Megan West as Michelle and Tina supported Laura well both in the songs and in the following dialogue. Good comic timing.

Eddie Souther (Damian Thomas)

Damian has a lovely stage presence and is very confident on an empty stage. He had the right amount of determination to be brave against the baddies at the start and throughout a nice relationship with Deloris including his ultimate romantic success which was believable. Personally I think I would have liked to see a bit more “sweat” but that’s a small point. “I could be that guy” was sung and acted really well – tuneful and heartfelt – also well supported by the street people managing the transformations which would have been surprising to those that did not know the stage show.

Curtis Jackson (Keith Sullivan)

Had a good gangster, sleazy look. I loved the whole “When I find my Baby” number – Keith really did hype the whole Barry White feeling but could also have heightened the sarcastic / not so nice parts for enhanced comedy. There were a few issues like what to do with the gun when not being used so have a think about prop issues in the future. Well supported by:

Joey (Sam Pemberton)

TJ (Mark Read)

Pablo (Ashleigh Wells)

The 3 boys worked well together in all their scenes especially in their major vocal numbers. All had good voices and the both their major songs were really well performed especially “Lady in the long Black Dress” each committed themselves totally. Sam played the Lothario very well playing up to the ladies; Mark was more sweet and the matinee idol; and Ashleigh really milked his moments as the latin lover. Ashleigh really understood the comedy and his timing was good also managed a good accent. Three clear and separate characters.

Mother Superior (Claire Barber)

In my opinion this is one of the best female roles as the MS gets nearly all the funny lines but the comedy is in the acting, the demeanour and the delivery which is not easy when your body is completely covered, you can't wave your hands around and your face and expression is your only tool. I think Claire totally cracked this role – she looked the part, was still and dignified at all times but really connected with Deloris, the nuns and the other characters. “I can do that with a look” is a line in a play I have recently been involved in and Claire really did manage to deliver the comedy with her clear speech, clipped delivery and her expression. Not only that she can sing beautifully – a bit drowned out by the band in one song - her renditions of “Within these walls” and “I haven't got a Prayer” were lovely. Claire managed to portray the spiritual nun living in the real world.

Monsignor O'Hara (Mike Hills)

A great male part to play. Mike created a good character, had good diction and got the comedy just right. The character really comes into his own in Act 2 as he embraces the success of the choir and assumes his “smooth Monsignor” persona. The whole of the confessional scene was well done and in the Sunday Morning Fever number, and the fund raising scene, Mike embraced the role wholeheartedly. Well done.

Ensemble

Everyone played their parts really well in the different scenes and it was nice that CMP had enough people and ladies especially to create a separate ensemble which makes it much easier to enhance the scenes not including nuns. Well done all especially as the street people and to everyone that had a small character role. Great that you were all able to be nuns and alter boys in Act 2 and enjoy the finale as a harmonious cast.

Nuns

I really enjoyed watching all the nuns. It's virtually impossible to identify anyone in their habits which is nice as you totally rely on their characters and each of the nuns seems to have created a nice little character for themselves. I liked the fact they were all individuals but operated as a single entity. The characters were kind, funny and naïve. All the nuns were engaged with the story, we could hear all their individual lines and had good reactions. All the singing was amazing with great comedy, tunefulness, harmonies and truly angelic in the more choral numbers. Everyone moved well and all were able to manage the choreography set. A thoroughly enjoyable heavenly chorus !

Sister Mary Robert (Rebecca Slocombe)

Sister Mary Patrick (Robyn Heffer)

Sister Mary Lazarus (Lisa Bennett)

All the ladies above played their roles very well and portrayed their rather well defined characters to the full. Rebecca really did portray the nervous and shy novice very well and when she found her voice I think we all were as overjoyed as she was. Rebecca has a beautiful clear voice and “The life I never led” was very poignant. Robyn was great as the overly excitable nun – very in your face, bubbly and smiley, and Lisa got down and rappy as Sister Mary Lazarus. Managed the comedy well and made us all laugh. Well done all of you.

As I mentioned before this production was very well put together and as a debut Director then I think Matt Thompson can be rightly proud. Its not an easy decision to make but I hope that you enjoyed the challenges that you faced along the way. Clearly you had an enthusiastic and talented cast and a very experienced production team but the director needs to have the vision and the commitment to get the show on the stage. All I can say is really well done.

I am sure that everyone left the show smiling and humming a tune, I know I did. Yes there were a few issues but I do hope that anything highlighted will not be seen as negatives but small things that stood out in something that was pretty good and so very enjoyable.

Kind regards

Susan Boobyer-Pickles

District 14 Joint Representative