



Society : Crowthorne Musical Players  
Production : **THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK**  
Date : 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014  
Venue : Wilde Theatre, South Hill Park, Bracknell  
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, District 14

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## Report

I was delighted to be invited to CMP's latest performance, *The Witches of Eastwick*, a musical based on the 1987 film that featured Jack Nicholson and Cher. The musical, adapted by John Dempsey and music by Dana P Rowe, is based on a novel by John Updike and first premiered at the Theatre Royal, Dury Lane in London on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2000.

The story follows three rather boring New England women who, frustrated by the lack of good men, unwittingly conjure up their ideal man. When he arrives, he seduces each of them in turn and teaches them how to release their powers but when they realise that they actually harm people, they soon start to have second thoughts.

CMP set their production in current time (with the clever use of mobile phones rather than answering machines). There were many excellent performances, particularly from the three witches, and the dancing looked visually interesting and effective. A good set and use of an imaginative lighting plot ensured an overall interesting visual production.

### **ALI BAGSHAW (Darryl Van Horne)**

This is a demanding role that Ali performed expertly. Although I did not like the interpretation of the character, there was nothing I can criticise about the performance – all the lines seemed to have been learnt with excellent cues and with a clear and audible delivery. His singing was fine – keeping in character (something I noted from his last performance as Motel). Movement was well rehearsed. I felt the character should have a light and slightly exaggerated characterization. Ali's interpretation was of a more realistic characterisation, which meant that it came across as a little sleazy. The problem was that it lost some impact – in particular the opening scene when Darryl first appears to the community. I think it needed more chemistry with the female population. However, with this being said, Ali's performance was consistent and his "sleazy" approaches were responded effectively by those on stage with him.

### **LAURA HARTLEY (Alexandra Spofford)**

I have watched Laura perform several times in the last year (and have even performed with her on one occasion) and was clearly her best performance to date. She has a lovely singing voice and dealt with the demands of the part superbly. One thing to note – be careful not to deliver your lines out front. You did this a couple of times and it looked odd. When you are in conversation with people on stage it helps to direct the lines at them otherwise it comes across a little false. You did not do this all the time, only occasionally but it is worth keeping an eye on this so that it does not become a habit.

**CATHARINE HAZELL (Jane Smart)**

Another excellent performance and Catharine captured the mousy school teacher character perfectly. Her singing, like the other witches, was wonderfully performed. I did find that you spoke a little quietly at times, only occasionally, so be aware of this and ensure that you maintain your volume throughout.

**SUE PRIOR (Sukie Rougemount)**

This was a superb performance by Sue as the nervous book worm Sukie Rougemount. Her singing was comfortably performed and blended well with the other witches. Her characterisation was spot on, showing a good understanding of what was involved. She clearly showed the different aspects to her transformation, showing her confidence that Darryl gave her. This was a first class performance by a first class performer.

**LYNN CLEGG (Felicia Gabriel)****TONY COLLINS (Clyde Gabriel)**

This couple produced a realistic interpretation of their characters – Lynn as the busybody do-gooder Felicia Gabriel and Tony Collins as her frustrated and errant husband, Clyde. The shock in Act two when Clyde kills Felicia was well delivered from my vantage point. Congratulations to Lynn on her singing, which, as with each of the principals, was very well done. I did feel that Lynn could afford to be a little bit more haughty, especially in her first scene with Darryl, but this was merely a personal preference as I felt it would have helped create more tension between the couple (Clyde and Felicia) and offer an understanding of why Clyde was being unfaithful. Lynn's performance of exposing the articles from her mouth looked well rehearsed. I had no difficulty hearing every word these performers spoke and their accents were consistently observed.

**REBECCA ROGERS (Jennifer Gabriel)****DAVID ALLEN (Michael Spofford)**

These two youngsters performed their roles competently. Rebecca performed her role superbly, having a clearly defined character. Her singing was very good, clear and very well acted. The balance between the two singers in *Something* was very well delivered.

**KATE LIGHT (Little Girl)**

I never really understood the relevance of the little girl in the production, other than perhaps the contrast of purity and innocence to the salacious and outrageous behaviour of Darryl. Kate performed this role perfectly, looking virtuous and innocent. Her balletic moves were executed with suitable grace and skill.

**MARK CONNELLY (Fidel)**

I understand that the original cast member had to drop out owing to illness and as usual, the understudy responsibilities fall on the director. Although it was only a small role it never fails to produce a laugh when Fidel eventually speaks towards the end of act two, and Mark delivered his one line with comic effect and generated a spontaneous round of applause.

**DANCERS (TASHA EDEN, ERIN HOPE PHARO, AMANDA WHEWELL & AMY WILLIAMS)**

All of the dancing was interesting and very well rehearsed. These four performers worked very well together and added particular interest to the scenes when they performed.

**HELEN HALLMEY (Gina Marino), CAT HILL (Brenda Parsley), DEBBIE MANN (Greta Neff), DAMAIN THOMAS (Joe Marino), PETER WINN (Raymond Neff), DAVE COLLIER (Ed Parsley), SARAH BOUCHE DE VITRAY (Rebecca), HELEN NICHOLSON (Marge Perly)**

The principal roles were superbly supported by a group of experienced performers. They added energy and range to the songs and danced with accomplishment. Characters were defined, even with small number of lines (for example, Dave Collier as the member of the clergy).

## **CHORUS**

The chorus looked very well rehearsed with all exits and entrances promptly executed. The diction and singing provided by this chorus were controlled and very well balanced (normally a problem when, as usual with amateur societies, there are more women than men). I would have liked to see more individual characterisation from the chorus, rather than just blend together. The performers mentioned above had the advantage of having named roles and lines or individual moments during the songs that helped their characterisation, but this needs to be continued throughout all the cast. Perhaps inventing a name for your character and back story could help? This again is a small point as felt the energy and enthusiasm of all the members of this chorus was excellent.

## **Musical Director (RICHARD STOCKTON)**

As with the previous two shows I have seen by CMP, the singing was very accomplished. Considering the slight imbalance of numbers, the sound was very well balanced. All the principals looked very well rehearsed and relaxed in their roles. The balance between orchestra and the singers was excellent and always felt that this was under control.

## **Director (MARK CONNELLY)**

This was a very well cast production, with all the principals performing and particularly signing very well. All of the scenes looked well rehearsed with the principals understanding their roles and exits and entrances clearly defined and executed.

Act one normally ends with the three witches flying. CMP cleverly used dry ice and lighting to disguise the lack of "flying" the actresses on the stage, a concept that was an excellent idea. However, I felt it would have worked even better without the use of blocks (or even have the blocks painted white) because they were visible during the "flight" and unfortunately diminished the effect.

## **Choreography (ERIN HOPE PHARO)**

I loved the simplicity, but effectiveness of the dances. Erin knows how to get the best out of her cast, and this show was no exception.

## **Stage Management (IAN ROBERTSON)**

### **DSM (Duncan Bruce)**

The set was very well managed on the evening I watched this show. On the whole the scene changes were efficiently achieved, although bringing on the house during a song looked somewhat odd. I can understand the reasoning, to keep the pace going and not wasting too much time between scenes, but it did seem odd. It may have been better if the cast brought on this part of the set or even wait for the cast to clear because there did seem to be sufficient time between scenes to reset. However, this was a small point, because the scene changes throughout were swift, prompt, quiet and efficiently managed. It was clear that the crew knew what they were doing, with all the items set and cleared without any hesitation or distraction to the pace of the piece.

## **Set**

The set was very effective. A cyclorama of a sunset sky that with lighting darkened after the arrival of Darryl was very effective. There were two painted hills with houses on top, stage right and left. This helped set the scene and added interesting perspective to the stage. The interior houses looked suitable and Darryl's house looked appropriately furnished. I would've brought Darryl's bed forward as it was slightly hidden to the side of the stage. I liked the ornaments that were hung from the ceiling, again, adding interest. Each scene was clearly, visually different that, to my mind, accurately portrayed its location.

## **Sound Design (TOM HORROX)**

The sound balance between the live orchestrated sound and the singers on stage was superbly managed. The orchestra did not drown out the singers and I could hear every word sung, which is not as easy as it sounds so well done. There was one issue with someone with a dodgy live mic that seemed to be ill-fitted or "live" at the wrong moment as I did hear an amplified rustle, but this only happened on a single occasion and did not spoil the show. The only way to reduce this is to ensure the performers are aware at all times where their mics are on – and this only comes from rehearsal and experience. The sound effects were appropriate (for example, the rain effect), set at the right volume and cued in on time.

## **Lighting Design (MICHAEL BRENKLEY)**

Michael's lighting design was interesting as always, appropriately lighting the various scenes. Red lights for the interior of Darryl's house, for example, and the bright summer day's lighting for the outdoor tennis. All the effects were competently set (the gobo effects for windows successfully achieved; the lit moon, for example).

## **Lighting Operator (BECCY WIRE)**

On the whole the lighting cues were on time. There seemed to be an issue when Sukie was not lit properly towards the end of act one and again at the beginning of act two. This seemed to be more of the case that the actors were in the wrong place rather than poor lighting – as I appreciate that once the actor stands in the wrong place, there is very little an operator can do to resolve the situation.

## **Wardrobe and Costumes (JANET WINN)**

I am not aware if any of the costumes were hired or if they were all made – but either way they all seemed appropriate to the characters. They looked like they fitted well and were suitably pressed and looked clean.

## **Properties (PETER WINN)**

All the props seemed appropriate to the location and period of this show. I loved the red cushions in Darryl's house!

## **Programme**

This twenty page programme was reasonably priced at £2. A colourful green cover with yellow writing was eye catching. Some of the pages had a smaller font to ensure everything fits onto a single page (scenes and musical numbers, for example), which unfortunately made it very difficult to read when the lights were down. The photographs (both the full cast and the individual photos) were of a good high quality and easy to see. I always enjoy reading cast biographies and was not disappointed to

read a little more about each of the principal performers. I also enjoyed the article about witches in New England.

Overall, this production was of a high quality that was one of the best I have seen by this society. I may not have agreed with some of the interpretation of characters (particularly Darryl) but this did not diminish an excellent, well rehearsed show. I note that this production has moved its slot from May to March with an attempt to increase audience figures. I sincerely hope that this was the case and look forward their next production.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Bird', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Gordon Bird**  
***NODA representative***  
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