



Society : Crowthorne Musical Players (CMP)  
Production : The Boyfriend  
Date : Thursday 27th May 2004  
Venue : Wilde Theatre, South Hill Park, Bracknell  
Report by : Kim Halliday, Regional Representative, Region 14

## Report

I would like to start by offering my thanks to Crowthorne Musical Players for inviting me to see this production, which they were performing in the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the show being premiered in the West End/on Broadway. This was my first review of a CMP production and also the first time I had seen this particular musical, so hopefully my review will be “fresh”.

**DANUSIA MALECZEK (Hortense).** Danusia coped extremely well with this part and perfected a very convincing French accent. She moved and projected well and her musical number, *It's Nicer in Nice* showed that she had a good, strong, singing voice. A pleasing characterisation.

**MELINDA BENNETT (Maisie).** Of the “finishing school” ladies, Melinda was the most confident and her acting and mannerisms helped to convince us that she was – indeed – training to be a proper little young madam! She stood out as the most experienced of the bunch, projecting clearly and treating us to a marvellously OTT accent, and her dancing could not be faulted. Melinda also displayed a pleasant, confident singing voice, and handled some beautiful harmonies, notably in *Won't You Charleston*. She also paired well with Bobby in their “romantic” scenes (although being hubby and wife must have helped!). Overall, this was a very strong performance from an experienced and talented individual. Well done, Melinda!

**DEBBIE MANN (Dulcie).** What a little trouper Debbie is! Not only did she choreograph the show, but she also stepped into this super role at the last minute and filled it extremely well! Debbie's vitality shone through as she filled the stage with her big personality and her number with Lord Brockhurst, *It's Never Too Late to Fall in Love*, brought the house down (boop boop be doop!). She also proved she knew her stuff when it came to the dance numbers and looked and sounded perfectly delightful.

**GILLIAN ALBONE and SARAH DILLON (Fay and Nancy).** Although smaller supporting roles, these girls worked well both individually and with others, demonstrating good acting and fine singing for their roles, as well as exceptional dancing skills.

**LAURA GOSDEN (Polly Browne).** Laura is an obvious star and managed, quite rightly, to “carry” the show. Polly is the main character and is in most of the musical numbers, and so an “all-rounder” was called for and Laura filled these requirements perfectly. Her stage presence and cheeky personality lifted the action whenever she was on stage and she sang, danced and acted her way through the show with confidence and ease. Laura also has a very expressive face, which she used to great effect during her “asides” to the audience and showed a good talent for comic timing. Her singing voice was also clear and suited the musical style of the era – and what a range! A top class performance!

**CHRIS WOOD, RYSZARD GORELL and DUNCAN HAMILTON (Marcel, Pierre and Alfonse).** Wow – men who can dance!! These guys paired extremely well with their respective partners and although most had limited dialogue, and some looked a little long in the tooth for their supposed tender years (!), this was more than made up for by the fancy footwork and fine singing on display tonight! Ryzard came across as the least experienced of the team, but on the whole, all three gave excellent characterisations and settled into their roles well.

**ANNE DARSLEY (Madame Dubonnet).** This was a rather strange portrayal and didn't quite seem to fit in with what we usually expect of this role. Although Anne had learnt her lines and had a more-or-less faultless accent, I think she had difficulty in coping with what should have been a larger than life characterisation of the sexy finishing school head. Anne is very tall and slender and her moves appeared stereotyped, stilted and, ultimately, unnatural. When required to walk “sexily” across the stage, she jutted her hips forward, leaned back and moved with a very strange gait. I think, too, that the duet, *Fancy Forgetting*, was set a little too low for her range and her French accent dropped slightly whenever she was singing solo. A shame, as I feel Anne has plenty of confidence and could have made so much more of this role with different direction.

**DAVID BENNETT (Bobby Van Husen).** David was obviously another of CMP's experienced performers and he gave us a very strong and confident performance tonight. He had a powerful theatrical singing voice and moved extremely well around the stage as he showed of his very fine dancing skills. He paired well with Maisie and the two of them had obviously had a lot of fun "Charlston-ing" around their kitchen at home in real life! An excellent performance.

**MARK CONOLLY (Percival Browne).** This was another good character portrayal from a confident and experienced actor. Mark was suitably pompous and had perfect command of the stage as he strutted around, walking stick in hand a la *Hercule Poirot*. Mark also showed his strong singing voice during his duet with Madame Dubonnet, *Fancy Forgetting* and showed quite a talent for comic timing.

**ALEX AUCKEN (Tony).** I wasn't too sure about Alex as Tony at the start of the performance, as he appeared nervous and quiet as opposed to Laura's excitable Polly. However, he soon settled into the part and gave us a very pleasing portrayal of the lovable "rogue". Alex was another obvious good mover (where *do* you get them all from?!) and treated us to some very fancy footwork, both solo and as a dance partner, and his soft "crooner" voice suited the music and the era perfectly. Not too sure about the greying hair for a young man, though – time to break open the *Grecian 2000*?!!

**JOHN CALEY (Lord Brockhurst).** John showed us what a good character actor he is by going totally OTT in his portrayal of the snooty (and rather lecherous) Lord. His experience gave him a strong stage presence, good projection, and he handled some great comic one-liners with ease. He also had a powerful singing voice and his comical duet with Dulcie, *It's Never Too Late to Fall in Love* was a delight. There was also signs that he was a confident "mover", too..! Is there no end to this man's talents?!!

**RO GORELL (Lady Brockhurst).** I'm not sure whether Ro portrayed a strong enough character to be paired with John's more exuberant Lord Brockhurst (I felt he needed to be "nagged" more!), but nevertheless, I felt she coped admirably with this small, but significant role.

**JOHN TAYLOR (Gendarme/Waiter).** These were smaller, non-speaking roles, but John played each very convincingly, reacting well to the action around him.

**DUNCAN HAMILTON and ELAINE ADAMS (Pepe and Lolita).** Although only on for one number, these two provided us with a wonderful interlude and helped to set the mood in the final Act. With the addition of a wig and some fancy clothes, Duncan was transformed almost unnoticeably into an extremely competent Latino dance partner, and he displayed some neat footwork and fancy "moves". Likewise, Elaine showed that she was obviously a very talented ballroom dancer as she twirled around the stage with confidence and ease. Magical!

**CHORUS (of Guests, Bathers, Nice People, etc.)** Although adding colour and movement to the stage whenever they were on, tonight's chorus were a little disappointing. Maybe this was because the principals were all very confident and the chorus's lack of experience was exaggerated. I'm not sure... Everyone seemed to know what they were doing and when they were required to be on stage, but some of the men (and women!) appeared unsure of the choreography or the words, and it would have been nice to have seen a few more happy faces, which would have lifted the mood to it's proper level (this is a "feel-good" musical, everyone, so smile!!!).

**DIRECTION (Carol Hardie).** This was an extremely professional production and Carol should be congratulated for her efforts tonight (although her talented principals and production team must have made it so much easier for her!). We had some good, strong character portrayals tonight and the action unfolded smoothly and with good pace. A marvellous job!

**MUSICAL DIRECTION (Nick Austin).** Nick's ensemble and presentation of 1920's-style music was absolutely spot-on (and this is something I can talk about with confidence as my partner plays with a 17-piece jazz orchestra!) Most excellent distribution of voicing in the orchestra, and so nice to see a proper double-bass. The Wilde Theatre's orchestra pit is perfectly situated to enable the MD to be seen by the cast, while protecting the audience from the wilder moments of orchestration; however there were a few occasions when the exuberance of the music took over and the cast were slightly overwhelmed. On the whole, however, a superb effort. The orchestra didn't seem to put a note wrong, and the cast clearly knew very well what they were about. Well done Nick and the ladies and gentlemen of the orchestra.

**CHOREOGRAPHY (Debbie Mann).** The choreography for this production was slick and entirely appropriate for the setting of the musical. Debbie had some very talented dancers/movers as principals and had exploited this, using the 1920s music to great effect. I particularly liked the use of the bags in the choreography for *Perfect Young Ladies* and the Riviera sequence was breath-taking! The *Carnival Tango* was also inspired; in fact, the choreography definitely made this show. And all this was achieved whilst also playing one of the principal roles! If I had one

---

quibble, it would be the lack of tap shoes, or tap shoe “sounds” during the “tap” numbers. Was this because the theatre wouldn’t allow the stage to be scratched? If not, I’m sure there would have been time for the principals to change out of them after some numbers, to avoid “clonking” being picked up by the stage mics. A shame, because I thought there were several numbers which cried out for tap shoes. Never mind — give yourself a huge pat on the back, Debbie — you’re a multi-talented lady!

**LIGHTING (Geoff Bamford and Charlotte Hollingshead).** Probably the greatest compliment for any lighting director/designer is for there to be no comments made – on the basis that it is only the cock-ups that get noticed and commented on! The lighting in tonight’s performance was well-balanced and without glitch, all cues seemed to be properly observed. The red hearts motif on the stage curtains during the intervals served nicely to maintain the romantic theme, and I especially liked the lighting effects when Polly had her sad moment. Well done, Geoff & Charlotte – an excellent job!

**SOUND (Lewis Harman).** 13 radio mics and 4 stage plate mics takes quite a bit of management, and Lewis showed how it *should* be done tonight. I didn’t detect the slightest hint of feed-back; every mic was up on cue ready for action, so that we didn’t miss a word of dialogue or lyric, and I was especially grateful that no attempt was made to try to boost the singers’ voices on the occasions when the orchestra got a little overpowering. The years of study paid off, with a smooth, properly balanced, professional presentation of sound... well done, and thank you!

**STAGING AND SCENERY.** The sets were all very sensibly arranged and implemented. Doors opened when they were meant to, “stone” steps weren’t rickety, and nothing that was supposed to be solid gave any noticeable wobbles – so well done to the construction team. In terms of design, there were some very nice period touches. The set for the carnival night scenes, combined with the lighting, gave a great atmosphere, especially for the Tango scene. All in all, a very pleasing set.

**WARDROBE (Gaby Anderson).** The wardrobe for this production was extremely colourful and well-coordinated and, like the set, perfectly of the period. I particularly liked the coordinated Charleston costumes and the costumes used in *The Riviera*, which were spectacular. The fancy dress costumes were also elaborate and very effective and the chorus costumes blended well. The principal girls looked great (and, more important – natural) in their various 1920’s wigs. A lot of attention had obviously been paid to detail and this had paid off by contributing to the a very smooth production. Well done Gaby!

**MAKE UP (Linda Peacock).** The make up for this production was perfectly adequate for the period and no one appeared to be over made-up or out of place. The finishing school girls all looked suitably fresh-faced and youthful, so well done for achieving this!!

**PROGRAMME (John Caley).** Tonight’s programme was clear and easy to follow and carried an charmingly *Art Deco* design which was in keeping with the setting of the show. There were good, clear photographs of the cast and interesting resumés, and although there was quite a bit of advertising, this was quite discrete. It was a good idea to have the list of cast and scenes/musical numbers on the centre pages for easy reference, as this is where the programme normally falls open on your lap. It was also good to see mention of the society’s membership of NODA AND a logo on the inside front cover (although the word “Association” was spelt wrongly and the usual phrasing is “Affiliated to the National Operatic and Dramatic Association”). For future info, a short piece on NODA intended for inclusion in programmes is available on the recently revamped NODA web site at <http://www.noda.org.uk>.

**FRONT OF HOUSE (Maxine Robinson and Friends).** I was well looked-after by the Front of House staff; they all seemed competently in control of their respective tasks for the evening. I even went away with a prize from the raffle, which is such a rare occurrence for me! Thanks to everyone who made me feel so welcome.

In summary, then, this was a superb presentation of a wonderfully “feel-good” show, by a remarkably talented group, and I look forward to seeing your future productions!

**Kim Halliday**