

BROS Theatre Company

GUYS AND DOLLS • MAY 1994 • RICHMOND THEATRE

REVIEW • RICHMOND & TWICKENHAM TIMES

What Guys! What Dolls! What a show!

After seeing two different casts in the National Theatre's Guys and Dolls, the somewhat disappointing film version twice and a surprisingly good one by Wandsworth prison inmates on the box, I thought saturation point had been reached.

But Barnes & Richmond Operatic Society confounded my expectations and astounded me (as usual), with their production of the show, directed by Sylvia Denning at Richmond Theatre this week.

Unquestionably, Frank Loesser's music and score captures the very essence of Damon Runyan's ironic and sophisticated vocabulary in the mouths of gangsters and gamblers.

High standards are set from the start in the frenetic New York street scene with John Tustin, Tony Bogod and Jim Trimmer as Nicely Nicely, Benny and Rusty Charlie giving conflicting advice on which horse to back in Fugue for Tinhorns.

When the Salvation Army troop led by Sarah Brown marches on, fruitlessly trying to round up sinners, with Follow the Fold, we have the opposing groups of gamblers and missionaries lined up.

But the devil does seem to have the best tunes as we meet Martin Eliffs nervy, engaging, Nathan Detroit, running The Oldest Established floating crap game in New York.

In love with the compulsively gambling Nathan is nightclub dancer Miss Adelaide - a delicious performance from Patti Bottomley, suffering psychosomatically with perpetual colds throughout their 14 years engagement.

Adelaide's Laments and her numbers with the Hot Box Dolls are a delight. Marie Creed gives a beautifully buttoned up portrayal of missionary Sarah Brown, until liberated by Bacardi cocktails, she loosens up with a vengeance in Havana, with Sky Masterton and creates hilarious mayhem on the dance floor.

Chris Warren plays the fabulous master gambler Sky, who knows his Gideon's Bible, with style and as a bonus, sings the best versions I've heard yet of My Time of Day, Luck be a Lady and with Sarah, I've Never Been in Love Before.

Viki Osman's superb choreography was given marvellously athletic performances by the men's chorus and there was immaculate timing in Sit Down You're Rocking the Boat led by Nicely Nicely (John Tustin nearly stealing the show).

There were many great cameo performances: from Terry Narey's Drunk; Andrew Powell's Harry the Horse and Bob Salter as the frustrated policeman Lt Branigan, to name but a few.

Always a pushover for the Irish ballad, I was completely beguiled by Iain Calder's Arvide Abemathy singing More I Cannot Wish You to Sarah Brown.

Musical director Carl Smith gave unstinted support. Malcolm Chilton designed the extremely effective sets and Sue Raftery the excellent Runyonesque costumes.

There is, of course, a happy ending. Sky is converted and marries Sarah and a reformed (?) Nathan weds his ever-loving Adelaide. It's a joyful show.

Jenny Scott
Richmond & Twickenham Times
