

BROS Theatre Company

MR CINDERS • MAY 1991 • PARKSHOT STUDIO THEATRE

Spreading Happiness

As the second half of its double bill at the Parkshot Studio, Barnes and Richmond Operatic Society last week celebrated the great English musical with a joyful revival of Mister Cinders that also teasingly hinted at our pantomime tradition.

Fresh as the day it was written, with all the original 1927 gags and business lovingly preserved, this was actually the version that transferred to the Fortune Theatre from the King's Head in 1983.

It included the new title song especially written by octogenarian Vivian Ellis, here sung with wistful charm by Janet Simpson as the rich little poor girl Jill and an all-star BROS chorus, a medley that has stayed with me all the week.

Indeed John Hebden's enchanting production, a winner in every department, will go on singing and dancing in the memories of all those who saw it long after the applause has faded. With a simple three-part revolving set, it was perfectly matched to the tiny stage, except for an overcrowded ballroom scene with a large cast dressed regardless of cost for the 18 th Century Drag.

Not quite a dancer, but a deft mover with a lightsome comedy style, newcomer James Meehan spread a lot of happiness with one of the best and certainly most tuneful performances I've seen in the title role, for once making even the Amazon catalogue song not only enduring but, with splendid hand and footwork, worthy of its encore.

There were many scene stealers in this strongly cast production: none more enchanting than Maggie Rose playing Phyllis as a Joyce Grenfell lookalike, and Gavin Morgan in his best ever performance as her semaphoring boyfriend Guy; the two joining Sheila Fitzgeralds Minerva and Andrew Macbeans Lumley in a gladsome Honeymoon for Four.

Just space for a special word for Merian Ganjou as the fiery Donna Lucia; and the ever amusing Bob Salter as Sir George, who has only to step on the stage to raise an anticipatory chuckle of delight.

John Thaxter

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