

BROS Theatre Company

PAL JOEY • MAY 1991 • PARKSHOT STUDIO THEATRE

Ladies' Night

Faced with the lack of a half-pint hooper with golden tonsils to play Joey – the hero as a heel in Rogers and Hart's Pal Joey – Barnes and Richmond Operatic Society should surely have re-thought plans to stage the show in a double bill with this week's Mr Cinders.

Jeremy Newton is tall, dark and reasonably handsome; he has an easy upfront manner with an audience and wears his costumes well. But while a loose-limbed insouciance looks perfectly okay in the choral numbers, Joey's solo spots highlighted untutored footwork and tested his ability to hit a note spot on.

Perhaps the two-show format has overstretched BROS resources. But Malcolm Chiltern's production, while sometimes roughing up John O'Hara's original book ingeniously fitted night club routines into the tiny Parkshot Studio, and proved to be a ladies' night.

The exquisitely tacky routines were choreographed by Jo Henwood, who joined the chorus line in neat polka-dot hotpants, to share the limelight with lively Cathy Early, Katy Hart, Dorne Hill, Sonia Raymond, Barbara Thomas and Lesley Withair – bless them all.

Angela Sturgeons amazingly laid back Mrs Simpson sent shiver after shiver up my spine with What is a Man? And a hard edged but finely honed Bewitched. And Mandy Stenhouse surprised and delighted even those familiar with Melba's Zip strip song; ice cool eroticism and a deadpan panache that deservedly won her a special round at curtain call.

I never grow tired of watching Anne Campbell, whose fine features and fair beauty lent an innocent poignance to her Write a Book and Take Him duets, as the long suffering Linda who gets the brush in the cynical closing moments of the show. Carl Smith pleased as the shrinking Victor taking Louis's tenor spot in the Flower Garden routine; John Boulton played Chicago conman Ludlow as a Seventh Avenue barrow boy, squiring Claire Godwin's blonde-wigged Gladys; and Richard Matthiae did a nice cameo as a Jewish tailor. And special praise for Peter Holt's three piece orchestra, discreetly tuneful and supportive.

John Thaxter

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