

SWAN Awards

- Winner **SWAN Award Best Supporting Female Performer in a Musical** – Heather Stockwell
- Nominated **SWAN Award Best Male Performer in a Musical** – Chris Warden
- Nominated **SWAN Award Best Musical Production**

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NODA Awards

- Winner **NODA Award – Kathleen Oyler Trophy for the best chorus work in a Musical** – The Cast

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42nd Street review from NODA London

When I agreed to step in at the last minute for your own rep who couldn't make it, I didn't realise what a treat I'd been offered. This was one of the best shows I've ever had the privilege of reporting on.

Director **Andy Lock**, Choreographer and Co-director **Melanie Edwards**, and MD **Martin Wilcox**, together with production manager **Lottie Walker**, a talented cast and an excellent technical team, had produced an absolutely delightful evening of first-class theatre. If this is indeed Andy and Melanie's last show for BROS, they're certainly going out on a high – and they'll equally certainly be a sad loss to the society.

From the very first bars, it was clear the band was excellent and the show was going to sound fabulous. **Martin Wilcox** set a lovely brisk tempo to get the mood going, and the sound was warm and rich. Throughout the performance there were excitingly varied tempi and a wide dynamic range, always held back in order not to swamp the singing. Of course, sound designer **Stuart Vaughan**, with the assistance of **Jo Epps** and **Sandra Mortimer**, also deserves part of the credit for a lovely balance. They were faultless on the cues and I enjoyed their clever work with subtly added reverb at appropriate times.

While complimenting the technical team, I also need to acknowledge superb lighting throughout by **Ed Pagett**, assisted by **Mike Bradbury**, **Chris Pike**, **Tony Pike** and **Michael Bishop**. They were crisp and quick with the changes, and the lighting was appropriate to each scene, pooling to highlight more intimate scenes and giving a strong sense of place whether onstage, backstage, in hotel and cafe or outdoors. The attractive scenery was under the charge of **Melanie Edwards**, and the changes were quick and quiet.

A splendid array of costumes, with lovely variations on 'normal' clothes as well as fabulous stage outfits, all fitting well, was managed by wardrobe supervisor **Wendy Godwin** with the help of **Zoe Harvey-Lee**, **Terri Creswell**, **Maggie Wrightson**, **Lesley Alexander** and **Jenny Russell**. I did feel that in 'Getting out of Town' all the girls would have worn gloves as well as hats – and I wasn't sure why Miss Brock was the only one without a coat, especially as she wore her furs in other indoor scenes. I enjoyed the bird cage, among all the other authentic-looking props by **Jane Bean**, **Veronica Martin** and **Helen Smith**, although Peggy's suitcase seemed extremely light from the start, and when opened, it was obviously utterly empty except for the scarf. A couple of towels or sheets would have made it look more like a young girl's entire wardrobe for her move to New York.

Louise Ellard-Turnbull had arranged appropriate hairstyles, including Mac's slicked down hair and Bert's curl, and an attractive and well-fitting assortment of wigs on the girls. I am being terribly picky to suggest that the make-up wasn't entirely consistent, with some fairly wide variations on eyeshadow in the girls. Obviously not a problem for the street and audition scenes, but more uniformity would have been better for the more regimented chorus numbers.

Of course, the dancing is tremendously important in this show, and **Melanie Edwards** (choreographer as well as all the other roles!) had arranged it beautifully, from the delightful opening with only the tappers' feet visible under the curtain to the 42nd Street ballet. Her version, reminiscent of Runyonland, was perfect for the talents available, and, like the rest of the show, expertly danced. (And I was very impressed by the fabulous scream – I'm not sure whose it was?) Other highlights included the cleverly set 'Getting to be a habit' which was most enjoyable to watch, while still feeling like a 'rehearsal', and the superb opening audition scene, with really accomplished tapping led by **Alexander McKinven** as Andy Lee.

I'm sorry I can't comment individually on all of the excellent performances – thank you all for your contributions to this first-class production. Super work I noted included

- **Charles Halford** giving a very credible portrayal of Abner Dillon's foolish infatuation, sympathetically enough for us to hope he found happiness with his next girlfriend
- **Emanuel Vuso**'s extremely realistic 'piano-playing' as Oscar
- **Kerry Magee**'s silly Phyllis
- **Darren Moss**'s harried Mac – with an amazingly powerful bellow for quiet!
- **Laura Crowley** as Lorraine giving a lovely clear invitation to the party at her house
- **Helen Shore** and **Gita Singham-Willis** as delightful 'elderly' waitresses at the Gypsy Tea Kettle.

Jamie Chidzey spoke Billy Lawler's cheesy dialogue with conviction, and also had a lovely singing voice and superb dancing. Another super voice and excellent dancing were those of **Chris Alaru** as Bert Barry – with lovely pebble glasses and curl. 'Shuffle off to Buffalo' was delightful with him joined in a lovely bubbly performance by **Rachel Williams** as Annie, just the right side of being strident, and the cynical turn by exuberant Maggie Jones **Heather Stockwell** – appropriately pulled back a little to make the number work as a whole, but elsewhere most amusingly larger than life. When the script says she got 'carried away' in her rendition of 'Shadow Waltz', she most certainly was!

Suzie Hance made Peggy Sawyer appropriately ingenue without being too saccharine. She was a lovely disciplined performer, with beautifully controlled singing even towards the outer reaches of her register comfort zone. I enjoyed the way she made her lovely long legs coltish when 'learning' the part, and there was a super build-up in the kisses with **Chris Warden**, who played dictator-with-a-heart Julian Marsh. His was yet another superb singing voice.

Kerry Sampson was a very believable Dorothy Brock, with an absolutely gorgeous singing voice making her most definitely the experienced expert star. She was splendidly bitchy, with the odd human moment to help us to understand why Pat was prepared to wait for her. She might have shown even more vulnerability with a bit more of an hysterical build-up to throwing Pat out before 'I know now'? Quiet gentleman hero Pat Denning was played with sincerity by **Andy Yeates**. A very small note: I felt the scene when he was punched by thug **Edz Barrett** was a little rushed: he fell down, leapt up, dictated a note, and sang 'Getting out of town' (very attractively) all in the space of seconds. He was probably asked to keep the show moving, and it was indeed a sparkling evening, but I wondered whether a little more time to catch his breath, wheeze a little, and stagger would all have contributed to make the punch more convincing.

However, I must acknowledge that the whole show had lovely tight direction which kept the pace snappy, and there were a number of clever innovative touches. I enjoyed the various people placed around the theatre so the opening excited remarks were by real people, not just disembodied voices. The shadows for the Shadow waltz were really clever and very beautiful.

The ensemble had a gorgeous rich chorus sound, with solid harmonies appearing effortless even during the fanciest of footwork. 'Dames', for example, had a super sound despite being sung by only seven men (in lovely costumes). It's not usual to have so many very good men singers and dancers, and they did themselves proud. In 'We're in the money' (including an astonishingly quick change for the urchins!) the better tappers seemed to be those at the front – but a note to those further back: even if you're at the back, keep the energy going because you can be seen. 'Shuffle off to Buffalo' was also delightful, with super singing, a lovely sound from the girls'

chorus and a great array of pretty nightclothes. 'Lullaby of Broadway' was just perfect. The shared line in "Let's call it a day" with Julian and Billy was neatly done – exactly as the authors will have wanted. (Mind you, I could say that over and over again about this production!) There was good consistent work with accents throughout. I also noted how well the eyelines were kept high to include those in the circles. Just one or two people stepped forward to say dialogue and then stepped back into line: I do encourage you to avoid doing that, because it looks so very false. There was really super work by the partygoers – subtle and not intrusive, but a believable silent party, and responding absolutely on cue when needed. And, not surprisingly, the curtain calls were beautifully costumed and plotted and extremely slick.

I am not sure who put together the very informative programme with lovely photos and very interesting background articles – but you might want to bear in mind that not all your audience have 20/20 vision any longer, and tiny white print reversed out over red and black patterns isn't easy to read, particularly in dim light.

Please don't take the suggestions above as anything other than ideas. My understanding of my role as a NODA rep is to offer constructive criticism to help improve the standard of amateur theatre. You made that extremely hard to do with this production, which was indeed better than some professional big-budget tours. Your audience enjoyed a super evening of top class musical theatre, and I am confident they'll be back to see you meet the challenges of *A Little Night Music* in June.

Zena Wigram
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