

SWAN Award

- **SWAN Award – Best Child Performer aged 14 and under** – Tilly Shales

A Little Night Music review from NODA London

Thank you for the invitation to enjoy your production of this delightful musical – and for the opportunity to chat to Wes and Clare Henderson Roe in the interval. The production team of Director Paul Turnbull, Musical Director Nic Luker, Choreographer and Assistant Director Edz Barrett and Production Manager Suzanne Yeates had pulled off a remarkable achievement in the high standard of a work that is not easy, to say the least.

Please do take any suggestions that follow as ideas that you might consider for making your next production even better, not as picking holes in a super show.

The set, designed and built by Wes Henderson Roe and company members, was most attractive, and combined with the costumes, made lovely pictures on the stage. The addition of shrubs and changes in windows and curtains to the same set exterior as well as interior was subtle and extremely clever. Stage Manager Jo Epps, and crew Sian Walters, Meg Hird and others, did superb quick well-planned work in changing the scenery, and I really liked the way the crew was dressed as servants.

The lighting, designed by Mike Bradbury, used different colours to help show interior and exterior very cleverly. I liked the green cast which added a verdant feel in Act II. The only scene where I wasn't entirely convinced was the introduction, when two of the liebeslieder quintet were well illuminated, two fairly well-lit, and one seemed to be pretty much in darkness. That may have been someone not standing in quite the right place – although they were so beautifully rehearsed, it was perhaps a conscious decision by your director. All the rest of the time the lighting was clean and helpful, and switched seamlessly between scenes. Well done Mike, Ed Pagett, Chris Pike and Tony Pike.

The scenery was complimented by perfect props, by Jane Bean assisted by Tracey Gillard. They included authentic-looking pistols, as well as a pretty tea-service, matching glasses holding appropriate wine, one of which shattered most satisfactorily, and a period-looking dustpan and brush wielded by the maid. (She wore a perfect cap – Petra's outfit would have looked more finished with similar headwear.)

The costumes by Mags Wrightson with the assistance of Zoe Harvey-Lee, Margaret Boulton, Lesley Alexander and Margaret Williams, worked beautifully with the scenery. They gave lovely colour palettes to the whole piece, while still working with the lib (eg 'the pink dress'). I assume the super look of the colours was the reason for the single empire-line dress which stood out for me among the other late-Edwardian costumes and confused the period somewhat – and I think I might have made the same call. The different styles in 'Woman of the World' worked well, although I felt it was a shame the Countess wasn't wearing the pearls that she'd been described as 'always wearing'. Desiree's huge hat in Act I shaded her face, as did Charlotte's later: with full sympathy for the challenge of hats on stage, I suggest trying to push them back further might have helped. The only wedding ring I could see was on Count Carl-Magnus (I wasn't sure that was entirely right for the character), and I couldn't see wedding rings on either Charlotte or Anne. All the shoes and boots looked right, and all the costumes were in good condition and fitted well; Desiree's costumes, in particular – and as appropriate – were very attractive.

Hair and make-up by Louise Ellard-Turnbull was almost all excellent. The only small criticisms are that I wasn't convinced by Anne's hair – it looked odd for her to have it down at the party, and she was definitely young enough not to need the ringlets to help her look 17 – and there was slightly too much make-up on Frederika.

Sound Designer and Operator Stuart Vaughan had his work cut out with some of the performers who didn't always project, and should be congratulated for how very well he managed. In particular, the water sound effect in Act II was beautifully done. The band sound was superb, so congratulations to him, sound 2 Phillipa Stone and Rigger Steward Epps, as well as to all the musicians and MD Nic Luker. I didn't hear a single note out of place in the shockingly difficult music.

While I can't mention every superb moment, everyone in the very well cast team worked hard. An array of excellent singers made most of the tricky music sound easy, and the uniformly top-

class acting brought out all the undercurrents in the plot. It was beautifully obvious how much time everyone had spent rehearsing. Despite some varied skills in waltzing, the set pieces worked well and used the whole of the stage area, and there were lovely clean freezes when required

The five liebeslieder singers sang the complex introduction well, with clear rhythms, though there were times when the ladies overpowered the men. Bear in mind that there are three women vs two men, and higher pitches always carry better anyway. And gents, opening your mouth too wide can strangle rather than enhance your top notes. These are minor comments; they worked extraordinarily hard throughout the piece, and made their multiple scenes with a range of entrances and exits seem easy.

Frederik (Andy Yeates) was suitably handsome – we could see why Anne had married him – and portrayed the lawyer torn between wife and ex-mistress well. He had a lovely singing voice when he supported it properly. I really enjoyed Emma Hosier as a very pretty Anne; she had a delightful giggle and I was particularly impressed by her focus and mime in front of the dressing table in 'Now'. She sang beautifully, even when moving around and sitting down (especially impressive on the very low chaise, with which she coped very well).

David Knight was perfect as surly Henrik, with another lovely voice; it just needed a little more support to help him project, especially when sitting on the low chaise. He had worked hard on using the bow and fingers to look as if he were playing the 'cello, so it was unfortunate that he wasn't holding the instrument with his knees properly – I'm sure Susanna Mesaros would have shown him if asked. I loved his floppy hairstyle, and his frustration and embarrassment over the failed liaison with Petra was particularly well handled by both of them.

In fact, Sarah Thatcher was superb throughout as Petra; and the Miller's son was beautifully sung and acted. Tom Cooper was a beautifully impassive Frid until brought to life by her; he just needed to believe that his dialogue was worth waiting for rather than rush it a trifle.

Tilly Shales did delightful work as Frederika, and her relationships with the various adults were very well drawn. Angela Sturgeon was also excellent as Madame Armfelt, with super elderly movement, even when almost invisible upstage, and precise enunciation. Her hand movements were lovely, but do be careful not to let them become repetitive. Her death at the end was subtle and very moving.

Kerry Magee was absolutely perfect as acidic Charlotte. She was an excellent drunk, and the 'Every day a little death' duet with Ann could not have been bettered on either part. John Wilkinson blustered beautifully as aggressive, stupid Carl-Magnus; he just needs to sing more with his belly to root his voice better – try singing into your back. I loved the knife-throwing – it was really excellently done.

Louise Ellard-Turnbull was a lovely amused and amusing, confident Desiree. 'You must meet my wife' was a highlight, beautifully done by her and Andy, and with perfect timing. She has a lovely voice and the music was perfectly in her range. She might try singing more vowels to make some of the lines legato, to enhance the excitement of her excellent acting. It was easy to see her as a fascinating femme fatale and successful international actress.

Other highlights were 'Remember', with all the comedy pointed to best effect, and 'A weekend in the country', which was beautifully staged and sung, with everyone's acting, especially Petra and Charlotte, really pointing up all the subtexts. Everything about the production was beautifully rehearsed, up to and including the lovely neat bows.

You don't need me to wish you luck with your production of 'The Producers' in October; I'm sure it will be a success.

Zena Wigram
District 2