

The Producers review from NODA London

Thank you for the opportunity to enjoy your production of this outrageous musical – it's been a favourite of mine since I first saw it in the West End. Director Deb McDowell and her assistant Sarah Perkins, MD Janet Simpson, Choreographer Jennifer Moorhead (with Louise Vinter on the tap), supported by Production Manager Lottie Walker, had all clearly worked hard to give us a show of the high standard that I've come to expect from BROS.

The programme by Fiona Auty was packed with content, including attractive photos and an assortment of amusing imaginary biogs; however, all the text was small, and I have had quite some trouble reading the names of the real actors. Do remember that not everyone's eyesight is perfect!

The set, designed and constructed by Alan Emsden with members of the company, was very clever. From the start the scene was set well by the 'Funny Boy' posters in front of the curtain, and the dressing room effect light bulbs around the proscenium arch – I liked the way the light bulbs changed later. I was particularly impressed by the use of the big flat 'doors' which alternately opened out to make Max's office and closed to make the street: a seemingly simple device which made the scene changes quick and effective. The addition of a rail, or a yellow fire hydrant, pointed the location neatly. The daftness of the singing pigeons was very well done – like so much of the set, it was a simple idea made to work very cleverly. A small point: the door into office had gaps which would have been better masked, because the working lights behind meant that when someone came up to look through them, his silhouette was clearly visible to a section of the audience. The changes into and out of the office for 'Unhappy' were extremely slick and I liked the clever shiny strip curtain drawn along for 'I Wanna Be' and then tucked away quickly and neatly for the return to the office. The crew who, under the direction of Stage Manager Jack Tidball, DSM Jojo Lippink and Technical Manager Wesley Henderson Roe, shifted the scenery so quickly and quietly deserved a prolonged round of applause all of their own. Lighting, designed by Colin Swinton and operated by Andy Mathieson and Gary Stevenson and company, supported the set perfectly. The different scenes were clearly demarcated, with everyone clearly visible and I really liked the way the lights on the skyline on the cyc showed the time of day. Props, by Jacqui Withall and Donal Quinn, were appropriate and seamlessly managed.

Costumes, by Suzy Deal assisted by Terrie Cresswell and Wendy Godwin, Kate Johnston and Sarah Seymour, were absolutely lovely. There was super attention to detail, from the beautifully dressed theatre audience right through to Max's sock suspenders. The quick changes were all excellent – your team of dressers was clearly on the ball. Roger's dress really did look like the Chrysler building, and I was impressed by his very high heels – and the dreadful codpiece he wore in the 'auditions'. The only suggestions I offer are that Leo tended to pull his hat a bit too far forward and thus cover some of his facial expressions, and that if you use micropore down your spine it will hold your mic cable in place and, covered in make-up, can be made nearly invisible for low-backed costumes.

I thought all the hair, designed by Louise Ellard-Turnbull and executed by Heather Stockwell and Aggie Holland, was great, from Max's wild mop to Ulla's blonde curls. However – to be really nit-picking – while I really liked Roger's make-up, and was impressed by the consistency in the chorus girls' look, there were one or two other areas where I felt make-up might have been better. The glamorous theatre goers were perfect, but while putting some people into nuns' habits for 'King of Old Broadway' was helpful for a quick change, it meant they ended up with make-up and some hair showing, which spoiled it a little. Similarly, the little old ladies were generally very youthful-looking below their grey wigs. They needed to add some lines and eyebags and perhaps do something about their gleaming white teeth. (Their elegant character shoes didn't really help either: the two men in drag were actually more successful in looking elderly, helped by their flat shoes.) I really liked Roger and Carmen's make-up (including Carmen's wearing the Gloria Swanson beauty spot), though I felt that it might have been helpful to have Roger's 'squat fireplug' lighting designer Shirley Markowitz wear less – rather than more – make-up than Carmen.

Stuart Vaughn had done good work on the sound design, and coped very well with some wide variations in volume by the singers. These included dealing with some really loud chorus singing at times when they would have made his life much easier if they'd remembered that they were supposed to be accompanying a soloist.

Choreographer Jennifer Moorhead had set and rehearsed dancing which worked most effectively despite the lack of space. BROS is lucky to have so many good dancers and it was obvious that they'd all rehearsed thoroughly. In particular I was impressed by the super line-up of talented lovelies in perfectly matching costumes (including gold shoes) for Leo's 'I Wanna Be' (all giving great reactions to the lines). Their tap choreography by Louise Vinter was super, and I really enjoyed the big finish: just wait until you're right in the wings before you relax.

I apologise for not being able to comment on every individual performance: you all know that you contributed to a successful and polished production. The chorus work was excellent throughout, from the fabulous opening number with clean dancing and excellent singing, right up to the slick bows. Although at the start MD Janet Simpson's monitor wasn't working, there were no clues at all to the audience that there'd been a technical hitch: the singing was confident and the cues spot on. I congratulate everyone on how clear their words were. (I really enjoyed the violin solo in 'King of Old Broadway'.) The orchestral sound was warm and rich without overpowering the singers – it was a real shame about the crackle (I think either the percussion or the bass was overloading the system) which started towards the end of Act I and reappeared intermittently throughout Act II.

Bryan Cardus had constant energy throughout all the frantic nonsense, and was a delightful Max. I really liked his clear enunciation and the way he pointed all the jokes. He looked suitably unkept and had a fabulously expressive face as well as a very good singing voice. 'Betrayed' was particularly well done – and I enjoyed the silliness of his sneaking out in the middle of 'Til Him' until caught by Emanuel Vuso's O'Houlihan.

Tom Cane (Leo) definitely was "good singer" – and also a good dancer, and a sympathetic actor: I liked the way he used his eyes. He could have used the blue blanket a bit more often, rather than only when it was specifically referred to in the script. 'That face' was particularly well sung, with super dancing by both Leo and Ulla, beautifully choreographed for the tight space.

Ulla (Rachel Williams) was fabulous: all-singing, all-dancing and definitely having the real belt the part calls for. The men's reactions to her were super, and I loved her knowing smile.

Nigel Coe's Franz was also absolutely gorgeous. He too did super work with his eyes – and I loved Max, Leo and Roger's reactions to him. He really enjoyed the daft nonsense of the part, going completely over the top but never self-indulgently so, and staying fully focused. 'Der Guten Tag Hop-Clop' was priceless and 'Haben Sie Gehort' just as good.

I really liked the relationship between Roger (Chris Morris) and Carmen (Mathew Madeley). Mathew had lovely natural movement which was perfect for the character, and I liked the way he used the whole of his vocal range for the dialogue to make the most of the jokes. Roger's fabulously camp Hitler was splendid, and they made their reconciliation after 'Prisoner of Love' unexpectedly sincere. Roger's line-up of odd-ball assistants was good, with a well-balanced sound, and I liked the way they all sang throughout their exit through the audience – though I was disappointed that they didn't actually do the conga.

Will Brooks was a scary aggressive Mr Marks, and later I really enjoyed Donald Dinsmore's wooden boy dance, and also his Stalin. I liked the way Guy Chaperlin made Sebastian the butler so austere to start with and then joined in with the rest of the camp coterie later. He sang 'Wand'ring Minstrel' beautifully and was a suitably butch Sergeant by contrast (I did like the reference to Guys and Dolls in his biog!). Darren Moss was also amusing as Bryan the set designer, Churchill, and then Rolf from Dusseldorf.

All the men singing 'Unhappy' were really secure in the harmonies, making a most attractive sound, and the soloist had a lovely warm bass voice. Well done to the person who collected the dropped pencil on exit from the office without a second's hesitation. Stormtrooper Jonathan

Warriss-Simmons had a really lovely voice and all four of the Heil-los sang their well-balanced harmonies beautifully.

Usherettes Tracy Sorgiovanni, Helen Shore, Gemma Melhuish and Helen Lowe were attractive and slick and reacted well to the dialogue. I enjoyed stenographer Emma Hosler just getting on with typing in the courtroom, and later being a little more involved in a very nice cameo. Another good performance was that of the pianist in the audition – she reacted well and participated fully without pulling focus.

I felt that your re-interpretation of the big production numbers to suit the small stage (and the large talents of the cast) worked very well.

Please don't be upset by the few criticisms I've offered: when a production is of such an extremely high standard it's quite hard to find something to say other than "this was an extremely good show" and my report is trying to suggest little areas where slight improvements would make it even better. Congratulations on a very impressive production with super performances, and a pace that never slackened.

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