

A Class Act review from NODA London

I was very pleased to see that BROS' June production was, in fact, the London amateur premiere of 'A Class Act' – a lesser known piece of musical theatre. Like many others, I'm always keen to watch new material, in any format/genre, as this keeps things 'fresh' and tests the boundaries for what both cast and audiences enjoy. It is also a welcome opportunity to view something different from the norm...

Congratulations to BROS for taking on this exciting challenge and also linking with Cancer Research UK for this production. I'm certain that the charity collection organised was much appreciated.

A fairly small, but exceptionally talented, cast delivered a wonderful evening's entertainment. Whilst 'A Class Act' isn't a show with particularly toe-tapping songs, this bittersweet musical's strength is in the actual storyline, the characters themselves and song lyrics. Even though the show introduces such disquieting topics as mental health and cancer, it was done so in a tactful and understanding way. It should be stressed that this tight cast handled these sensitive issues exceptionally well.

Using flashbacks, and the device of time running backwards, 'A Class Act' retraces the high and low points of Ed Kleban's personal and professional life. This was another fabulous show from a quality society that strives for excellence. I suspect that the small cast of eleven, and little-known show itself, might have been the reason for some empty seats in the auditorium. BROS must certainly be applauded for taking a 'longer-term view', in staging new material, and for not being solely focused on immediate box office returns.

Congratulations must go to Andy Yeates (Director) and Darren Moss (Assistant Director) who combined to ensure the overall success of this show. It must have been pleasing to see all your hard work, and effort, come together in such a robust performance. The principals had been very well cast and maintained their believable characterisations at all times. Actual staging worked very well and an obvious high-standard of attention to detail ensured everything ran smoothly with no delays or distractions.

Artemis Reed, Musical Director, ensured his small, but well-drilled, band provided fabulous support throughout this production. All music was perfectly timed with the vocals being both well-rehearsed and first rate. I was pleased the music never overshadowed any dialogue, or singing, during the show.

Choreography was excellent and congratulations must be given to Gita Singham-Willis whose dance routines were both complex and always wonderful to watch. It must have been a challenge to choreograph each with a unique flavour and it was obvious just how much time, and effort, had gone into the preparations. 'Paris through the Window' was fantastic but it was Gauguin's Shoes, with picture frames as dance props that proved exceptional.

Chris Morris was a delight to watch perform as the clearly talented, but troubled, Ed Kleban. Displaying a wide range of emotions, the audience was left in no doubt as to Ed's ongoing mental demons and the cause of so much personal angst. A powerful piece of acting coupled with a terrific voice and some nifty footwork. 'Light on my Feet' was the first of many opportunities for Chris to demonstrate his full range of skills and he did so in style. An exceptionally talented, and ideally cast, leading man.

Tracy Sorgiovanni was wonderful as Sophie – Ed's oldest friend and first love. This role demanded a huge amount of character acting and Tracy gave a great performance here. It was Sophie, who as an oncologist in her later life, confirmed Ed's cancer diagnosis. Unable to handle this news, Ed let it instead destroy their long friendship. With many opportunities to demonstrate a fabulous singing voice, it was 'The Next Best Thing to Love' that was Tracy's standout number. Carl Smith performed well as Lehman, the head of the BMI Workshop who continually challenged his students to succeed. Strong character acting throughout, it was 'Charm Song' that allowed Carl to demonstrate his vocal skills and he delivered well.

Liam Rouse took on two roles and did exceptionally well in portraying very different characters. Initially, the audience was treated to Bobby – Ed's best friend and fellow member of the BMI Workshop. Loud, outrageous and displaying some great 'laddish' behaviour, Bobby provided a vehicle for some wonderful character acting. It was Liam's camp portrayal as choreographer Michael, however, that had the audience in stitches. The humour, coupled with some amazing dance steps and those high kicks, were simply fabulous.

Louise Ellard-Turnbull played Felicia, Ed's boss at Columbia Records and member of the BMI Workshop. Always demanding more and never allowing a moment's rest – it was all 'push, push, push' and keep producing the goods! The duet, with Ed, 'Don't do it Again' gave Louise the chance to demonstrate her excellent vocal skills.

In his first show with BROS, Chris Nash took on the roles of Charley, Goddard and Jean-Claude. Performing well, and delivering solidly throughout, Chris certainly has the talent. I look forward to seeing him perform again in future shows. Jonathan Warriss-Simmons did well as Marvin, the composer whom Ed was asked to provide lyrics for. A good cameo role coupled with solid support throughout.

Georgina Skinner was excellent as Mona, one of Ed's many love affairs and member of the BMI Workshop. Georgina demonstrated her fabulous singing voice in the solo 'Mona' and I look forward to seeing/hearing her perform in a principal role oneday.

Jasmine Henricson (Sarah), Faye Brann (Rebecca) and Nicola Cane (Lucy) all provided strong support as part of the cast and were fabulous in 'Broadway Boogie Woogie' with Michael.

The programme was of a very good standard and full of much information for the audience to enjoy reading. There were some terrific photographs of rehearsals together with great cast and creative team biographies. The Chairman's Welcome and Director's Note were both interesting to read and gave an insight as to why BROS elected to stage this lesser known show. As always, it was pleasing to see the prominent NODA reference.

Set design was handled by Ian Nethersell, Ed Pagett and Andy Yeates. Build crew was extensive and too many to individually name. The set was relatively spare and allowed the large cast to move freely on an uncluttered stage. This was ideal for the extensive choreography. Ian Nethersell, Stage Manager, assisted by Meg Hird and the stage crew (Harri Osborne, Jen Healy and Berni Messenger) ensured all scene changes were handled swiftly and with minimal disruption/delay. As such everybody, and everything, was in the right place at the right time.

Anne Pringle managed Props and gathered together a suitable array which were of excellent quality and appropriate for the period and setting.

Wardrobe was jointly managed by Terrie Creswell and Suzy Deal with the selection of costumes being of a very high quality and appropriate for the time period and setting. Hair and Make-up were jointly managed by Heather Stockwell and Louise Ellard-Turnbull with all cast (particularly women) looking great.

Lighting was designed by Ed Pagett and jointly run by Mike Bradbury, Chris and Tony Pike.

Lighting was of a consistently high level throughout the show with all cast members being clearly lit when required. The use of projection onto the rear flats was managed by Gary Stevenson and the effect had a marked impact on the overall visual effect. Sound Design was by Stuart Vaughan and assisted by Jo and Stuart Epps. All sound worked well during the show with both speaking and singing being clearly audible.

Following the wonderful 'Made in Dagenham', this proved to be yet another excellent production. I am quite certain that the entire audience, like me, left feeling hugely impressed with the quality of this cast and BROS Theatre Company.

I look forward to visiting again in November and enjoying BROS' production of 'High Society'.

Des Wilby

Regional Representative

NODA London District 3

A Class Act review from Mark Aspen

"A *Class Act* is a production well worth seeing, I must admit it left me with a strong feeling of admiration for the whole of the cast and the production team, and for Ed Kleban's music, which I found effervescent and tuneful, accompanied by some very insightful and thoughtful lyrics. A great production, a great story and great music."

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