



**Society** : St. Albans Operatic Society  
**Production** : Calamity Jane  
**Date** : November 1999  
**Venue** : Alban Arena  
**Report by** : Colin Self

## Report

A good up tempo orchestra under the direction of Peter Jones gave a fine start to the evening's entertainment, but I wish the house lights had been dimmed earlier, then the audience may have listened instead of continuing to chatter. The excellent set and very colourful costumes created a good impression of a wild west saloon. The opening scene was very impressive and well choreographed with simple but effective movement and this was the theme throughout this show. The men's chorus were particular apt at showing this, especially in the movement in "Careless with the Truth" and "Adelaide" which looked particularly well planned. However, there was a tendency throughout the production for the chorus to be set around the sides with a vast empty centre space.

Charlotte Rhodes-Chamberlain looked just right as Calamity Jane. She had a good masculine attitude necessary in the role and some wonderful movements and facial expressions. Being tall she matched well with Matthew Gregory. Most of the songs were well within her range although the break in her voice was noticeable in "Men". She also tended to take liberties with the scoring in some numbers and whilst in the solo's it was not so noticeable in the reprise of "Secret Love" with Matthew there was a difference in the synchronisation of the voices. Most of the time her diction was clear although at times especially when excited she tended to rush the dialogue so that the words were lost to the audience, She had obviously paid great attention to her accent which was faultless throughout the whole production.

Matthew Gregory was excellent as Wild Bill Hickock with a good strong speaking voice and accent "Adelaide" was a delight to listen to and his rendition of "Higher than a Hawk" was superb. His scene with Calamity when he realises that he loves her was played with just the right amount of tenderness.

Robert Wigram playing Francis Fryer made a nice comic entrance with the Indian and had an excellent accent and delivery. As a song and dance man he was very good in "Ev'ryone Complains About the Weather" and his falsetto voice and timid manner in "Hive Full of Honey" was extremely funny. I especially liked his curtsey. Although looking a little young against Susan he acted well with her and they both were very believable.

Julie Tillin looked ideal as Katie Brown being dark and more demure she made an excellent contrast to Calamity. Her diction was very clear although at times her accent wandered and whilst her solo numbers were fine she tended to wander from the note in her duet with Danny. It was nice that she was of similar height to Danny as they looked very good together. In "Love You Dearly" Nick Clark as Danny Gilmartin showed what a nice voice he has and he looked the perfect hero type. He acted well with Bill Hickock in the cottage scene which was well appreciated by the audience.

In the minor roles David Berridge made a good blustering Henry Miller dominating the stage at all times but he did tend to use the waistcoat pockets too much which was distracting. Helen Pettet made a good Adelaide Adams sang "It's Harry I'm Planning to Marry" well accompanied by some nice simple movement from her men suitors.

There were some good cameo roles from Arthur Harris as Rattlesnake looking more like Bud Flannegan than ever and it was nice to hear John Taylor leading the men in the reprise of "Adelaide". Overall the chorus worked extremely well together with good tight movement in the choreographed numbers and they made an extremely good sound in the ensemble work. They overcame the difficulty of getting off stage after "Black Hills" well by miming chat and excitement which kept the scene moving.

Although the set was very impressive it must have been difficult to change scenes as there was a long pause into Adelaide's dressing room and the lights were raised whilst the set was being changed. There was also a bad sight line stage left which revealed players waiting to come on. There were some very nice touchoc in Martyn Knight's production especially the gag with Danny Gilmartins bandage and Calamity's fall back into Bill Hickock's arms and I particularly liked the way the curtain calls were choreographed, but I would have liked to see more of the chorus dressed as saloon girls and some of the cowboys looked too clean.

A very good and colourful production of this show which sent the audience home happy, singing many of the well loved songs which is what this business is all about and we thank St.Albans Operatic for inviting us.