



Society : St. Albans Operatic Society
Production : Charlie Girl
Date : April 1996
Venue : Alban Arena
Report by : Lennie self

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St. Albans's Operatic Society has a well deserved good reputation for the standard of their musicals, and Martin Knight's enjoyable production of "Charlie Girl" was no exception.

It was good to see the notices Front of House and in the programme warning the audience of the bang and flash in Act 1 (did it happen at each performance?) and use of strobe lighting in Act 2. Some societies still fail to give this warning.

The orchestra, under the direction of Stuart Harding, was excellent, an superb set of musicians playing expertly, well controlled and always sympathetic to the singers.

The "Souvenir Brochure" programme was a good idea.

I liked the staging of the opening which built up well. "The Most Ancestral Home of All", was well sung by everyone. David and Peter Barker were ideally cast as the two male tour guides, Jerry and Pete. The female guides Fred and Sam (Julia Smith and Carolyn Arthur) looked more like girl guides in their uniforms. The children were used well and I liked the various family and group arrangements.

Lady Hadwell's three daughters were delightful. Xanthe Johnstone, was ideal playing the title role of Charlie Girl. I liked her interaction with Jack and Joe. "Like Love" was very enjoyable but, on Thursday night. "Bells Will Ring" was spoiled by some distortion from the sound enhancement system, (however, there was some very good off stage singing from the chorus and good accompaniment from the orchestra). As the tomboy of the family her accent was less "top drawer" than her sisters.

It was necessary for her cap to cover her hair but unfortunately it also covered her face and masked her expressions, and she looked far too clean to have been tinkering with a motor bike. She looked absolutely lovely when "transformed" for the ball and danced well.

Lady Fiona (Carla Tams) was most impressive, giving an appropriately O.T.T. performance with a very "upper crust" accent displaying her acting and dancing ability and singing well.

Clare Pettet playing Lady Penelope also worked hard all evening, singing and moving well. Her accent was also appropriately O.T.T.

Peter Jones was absolutely superb as Nicholas Wainwright. His accent and general mannerisms were wonderful, (reminiscent of Derek Nimmo in the original production) and he displayed great versatility, singing, dancing and even displayed his suppleness whilst practising yoga. I liked his delivery of "Football Results"

Another very good performer on Thursday was Robert Milner, he acted with confidence and had excellent timing and also moved and sang well and was ideally cast as Joe Studholme. I particularly enjoyed "My Favourite Occupation" and, of course, one of the highlights of the evening was Joe leading the chorus in the exciting "Fish and Chips" in Act two.

Joe and Wainwright interacted well together and I liked both their singing and movement in "Charlie Girl" and "I Ates Money" Susan Brodie looked just

right as Lady Hadwell, elegant with an impeccable accent and she moved well, however, at times her dialogue lacked conviction and timing was slow (especially the dialogue between Kay and Lady Hadwell). but their voices blended beautifully in "Let's Do A Deal".

The other superb performers on Thursday were the Connor family. John Dell, playing Jack Connor, sang well and acted with confidence, such an easy manner on stage. He maintained his accent well as did his "mother" Kay Connor, played with great verve by Jane Forster, who gave an animated performance throughout the evening, "What Would I Get From Being Married U was sung well by both of them, with superb diction and nice movement. (The bedroom set looked somewhat sparse).

"The Party of a Lifetime" was one of the highlights of the evening. I loved Kay Connor's bluesy voice and the choreography was dynamic and chorus movement full of energy.

Throughout the evening the chorus worked hard and sang well, but the men's chorus excelled themselves accompanying Lady Hadwell in "I was Young" I liked the staging for this number. The society is fortunate to have so many good dancers in the cast, and they all looked lovely but the dance routine "Society Exposed" lasted too long.

Arthur Harris and Tug Wilson were two affably roughish suspicious characters and Scott Lear showed his versatility playing Sasaki.

Overall the production was very enjoyable and choreography effective, but the show itself needed "pruning". Act One seemed long and lacked the energy of Act Two. Generally the lighting was good, especially the fade with spot on 'Joe in Act One, but at times faces were in shadow, masking facial expressions. The "strobe" was effective, but lasted too long.

Some of the minor characters could not be heard, and there was distortion with the sound system, at times booming but at others difficult to hear.

Never the less, it was a most enjoyable evening's entertainment.

Thank you for your hospitality and an especial thank you to Mary Myers.