



**Society** : St. Albans Operatic Society  
**Production** : Hello, Dolly!  
**Date** : November 1998  
**Venue** : Alban Arena  
**Report by** : Colin Self

## Report

This colourful show opened with an up tempo overture played by a superb orchestra (what else could you expect with Peter Holt as Musical Director) on to one of the finest sets I have seen at an amateur production. I would however have liked this set to be revealed in all its glory as the tabs opened as it looked so much better fully lit. It may be that physical limitations of so large a set made this impossible.

Peter Stearn made an excellent Vandergelder with good strong projection and a chance to show what a good voice he has. The accent was strongly upheld throughout the show and little touches like his hair parted in the middle gave made the character so much more believable. Unfortunately there seemed to be some trouble with his mike during the second act which muffled the voice.

As Cornelius Hackl, John Dell gave a commanding performance showing his talents as a singer and dancer and his rendition of "It only takes a moment" was very well sung. His timing was excellent, especially in the antics in the hat shop scene, and brought laughter from the audience. He was also helped by having an excellent partner in Robert Wigram as the gormless Barnaby who looked so natural on stage and showed how lucky it is that St.Albans has a Youth Musical Theatre to bring on young talent.

I was very impressed with Julie Martin as Minnie Pay. Her opening speech, alone on stage, was very active and exhilarating, immediately captivating the audience. She looked stunning on stage, enhanced by the wonderful costume especially in the final scene.

Mrs.Molloy (Clare Basinger) had a chance to sing a beautiful song in "Ribbons Down my Back" and she seized it with both hands, giving the song such poignancy and meaning. It was beautifully sung and her dancing talents were used to the full in "Elegance" and "Dancing". However her diction could have been more pronounced and her accent at times slipped.

Charlotte Rhodes Chamberlin made a very imposing Dolly. She looked wonderful, has a beautiful singing voice and moves well and had some exquisite hand movements. She was not helped in the second act by problems with her microphone giving an echo to her lovely voice. On Friday night initially her dialogue was very fast (reminiscent of Barbra Streisand in the film. Whilst this fast dialogue can be shown in close up on film, on stage, where the audience is perhaps twenty yards away it sometimes appears gabbled and the words not distinct enough to be heard and some tke gags are lost).

At times I felt that she was not sufficiently larger than life, (after all, the original Dolly was played by Carol Channing who was always over the top) She looked far too young to have had the life experiences of Dolly Levi.

There are some excellent opportunities for cameo roles in this piece and there were several fine portrayals given. Clive Webb as the effete Ambrose Kemper (I almost expected him to have an artists brush and palette hidden behind his back. David Berridge, looking like Kaiser Bill Rudolph Reisenwebber and Karen Thorp as the spoilt continually crying Ermengarde all gave good performances. Jane Porster was able to show her natural talent as a comedy actress as Ernestina bringing laughs from the audience throughout especially at the end of the show having caught Rudolph. It was nice to see that Arthur Harris had yet again got himself a "star" part (how does he always manage this?) as the judge.

The chorus singing throughout was very good and there were some nice movements and staging in the chorus. Before the Parade" was particularly good, helped by the distinctive costumes and groupings which worked very

well. The men's chorus worked well together in the "Waiters Gallop" but were very ragged in "Hello Dolly" which on Friday had some people laughing rather spoiling the moment. However they coped very well with the simple choreography in "It Takes a Women".

In this production, by John Asher, I would have liked to have seen the three members of the stage crew who came on stage during the action dressed in simple costume. The three modern black clad figures distracted from the action.

Overall this was a very well performed show, very colourful, enhanced by beautiful costumes and a stunning set and was much appreciated by the Friday night audience.

Thank you, St.Albans for the invitation and for a very enjoyable evening.