



**Society** : St. Albans Operatic Society  
**Production** : Sweet Charity  
**Date** : April 2000  
**Venue** : Alban Arena  
**Report by** : Colin Self (with Lennie)

## Report

This show started off with an excellent up tempo overture from a large orchestra lead by Gareth Hughes; which put the audience in the right mood for what is a fast moving show of the swinging sixties. On Tuesday night however the band seemed to swamp the cast with sound and it was difficult to hear some of the dialogue especially when there was musical underscoring.

Charity is an enormous role for any actress to attempt as she never seems to be off stage and Clare Basinger handled the part superbly. Using her talents as a dancer she opened the show with some good solo dancing. She was able to get all the excitement of the girl who falls in love too easily and brought out the eternal optimism of the character well. Her scenes with both Vittorio and Oscar worked very well and she was particularly attentive to the dialogue being played centre stage when she was in the closet where it would have been so easy to "switch off", She showed what an experienced performer she was by carrying on with one particular scene despite technical difficulties. Her dialogue was clear and precise and the soft tone to her voice helped to produce some tenderness and sympathy for the character.

As Vittorio Vidal, Ross MacInnes held his good Italian accent throughout all of his scenes and acted well with Charity and Ursula March (Stephanie Lang) who with her long legs and stunning silk dress looked everybody's idea of the film star. His rendition of "Too many Tomorrows" was well sung with just the right amount of tenderness for the audience to realise that the character had some sympathy for Charity and was not out for an easy one night stand.

John Dell seemed to slip so easily into the role of Oscar Lindquist with good clear diction, a natural stage presence and an excellent singing voice. He responded naturally to Charity and the scene in the elevator worked very well with nice empathy between them.

I thought that both Joyce Smith as Nickie and Clare McMillin as Helen could have been more forceful in their characterisations possibly by using a harsher accent to accentuate a difference between them and Charity. They after all were a lot harder than Charity. Although both very accomplished dancers as shown in the superb movement in "There's Gotta Be Something Better Than This". they needed more power in the voice when singing Baby. "Dr earn your Dr earn" . Both of these characters accents needed to be worked on to make them more convincing.

"The Rhythm of Life" opening Act 2 is perhaps one of the best show stoppers ever written. With very colourful costumes and exciting choreography led by Nick Clark as Daddy Brubeck it looked good The difficult harmonies in this song were heard clearly from the chorus but it lacked pace and dynamism. Hopefully as the week progressed it will pick up the necessary pace to make the audience demand an encore which it justly deserves.

John Hope as Herman, complete with big cigar, gave a good portrayal as the hard bitten dance hall owner but could have shown a little more of the tender side of his character. After all he has to show the soft side of Herman in order to sing "I Always Cry at Weddings".

As one would expect from Ann Hertler-Smith the choreography was superb not only from the obvious dancers among the cast but she managed to make even the most left footed of the men move with ease. The dance in the Pompeii Club was particularly effective. There were some very good groupings and pictures at the end of the ensemble numbers and the chorus sung well together. A nice little cameo from Jim Parkinson as the Mexican waiter and Arthur Harris as Manfred.

There were some obvious problems for the stage crew on this first night as this show demands a large number of changes, but overall most of the scene changes worked well and hopefully improved as the week progressed. There did however seem to be a lack of co-ordination between the stage manager and the lighting designer as the lights were brought up too soon on two occasions when crew were still on stage.

It was the sound that caused most trouble on Tuesday night. Many times the mikes were not brought into play soon enough and needed to be adjusted so that the audience were at least given the impression that the sound was natural. This was certainly not up to St.Albans usual standard and impinged upon the enjoyment of the production.

Overall the show worked well with good movement and excellent dancing but on Tuesday the show lacked the dynamism and punch that is normally associated with this musical and hopefully this will have improved as the week progressed.

Thank you for an enjoyable evenings entertainment.