



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Society: YEOVIL AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY

Name of Production: ANYTHING GOES
By Cole Porter

Date: 1st April 2023

Venue: The Octagon Theatre, Yeovil

Adjudicator: Claire Morris

Introduction

Anything Goes is a 1934 musical with music and lyrics by Cole Porter. The original book was a collaborative effort by Guy Bolton and P. G. Wodehouse. The musical has been revived several times in the United States and Britain and has been filmed twice.

The *S.S. American* is preparing to set sail from New York to England. Billy Crocker, a young assistant to Wall Street tycoon Elisha Whitney, a passenger on the ship, decides to stow away in hopes of wooing his long-lost love and wealthy debutante, Hope Harcourt, who is also on board. However, much to Billy's chagrin, Hope's mother, Evangeline Harcourt, is delighted that Hope is engaged to be married to a stuffy Englishman, Lord Evelyn Oakleigh (who is also onboard), upon arrival in England. Also on the ship are Reno Sweeney, an evangelist-turned-nightclub singer, and her bevy of "angelic" showgirls. The ship has no sooner set sail than Reno runs into Billy, an old friend, and he persuades her to help him break up Hope's engagement. "Moonface" Martin, a gangster known as "Public Enemy 13" and his moll Erma are disguised as a reverend and a missionary, respectively. They have two sidekicks and all four attempt to evade the law while on board. Billy eventually learns the identity of this misfit bunch, and, in exchange for his silence, they too join in the scheme to break up Hope and Lord Evelyn. After more disguises, ploys, confessions, mistaken identities, and marriage proposals, there are 3 weddings to celebrate at the end and all is well.

Setting

This was a splendid set which went on to offer more and more as the evening went on. As we arrived to take our seats it was really interesting to see an open set with cast members already in situ and ‘performing’ in so far as gentle actions and soundless conversations taking place. We saw a bar stage right and two small tables and chairs with red tablecloths stage left. There were three people at the bar with the barman and one occupied table by a couple. ‘Coles’ in sparkling lights above the bar and a tall urn with flowers completed the set. There were subtle shifts as we watched – the couple moved from the bar to the table and one person moved from the table to the bar. All movements were incremental and eventually the couples on the two tables started to chat to each other.

This engaging beginning was swiftly followed by a scene change to an impressive boat complete with portholes, upper deck and ship railings. Later we would see the front of the boat changing to reveal cabins which moved out onto the stage floor – sometimes one, sometimes two – which were later used as cells. There was superb impact when the opening of Act 2 revealed a glamorous night club on board. This was a visually impressive set, with swift changes made.

Music

When the Overture began, I looked round, not able to see any orchestra, and deciding that perhaps this was really well taped music we were listening to. Then, a swift set change revealed SS American in all its glory and then we could see the eight -piece orchestra, cleverly located on the upper deck. Great touch! The 1930s mood of the score was captured perfectly musically and the talented and spirited orchestra led tirelessly by the superb musical director. The standard of the music and of the singing was extremely high throughout.

Light and Sound

There was some very effective lighting creating a series of wonderful backdrops from romantic balmy evenings to razzmatazz and glitz. Our eyes were gently but continually being guided through the effective spots used to focus on either the area of stage or performer. Nice touches were the dimming of the porthole lights for the evening, but lighting up stairs to upper deck; light focused on one cabin then the other and the mood lighting for the bedroom. The lighting really enhanced the show as it constantly adapted and changed and always guided us to where we should be looking on stage.

Good sound quality meant everything and everyone could be clearly heard – no words missed!
Liked the ship’s horn!

Costumes, make-up and props

Some stunning costumes which were smart, colourful, elegant and thoroughly appropriate for the time and location. A great range from sparkling evening outfits to naval uniforms, stoles, jackets, trousers, short white 'angel' dresses which often helped establish character. Great to see that also some fun was had with the wardrobe – Billy and Erma's 'sailor' uniforms, Evelyn's bright outfits and the Angels revealing more sparkling, shiny costumes underneath their dresses. Impressive to see so many hats used which never hid faces (with the exception of the lady in the wheelchair of course) and stayed on through the dancing.

Hair and makeup were attractive and reflected the era perfectly. Musical make up showed well defined features and hair was well back from faces.

Props were suitably in place ranging from perhaps the more standard drinks, bottles, glasses, phone and sunbeds to the guitar case with a rifle!

Choreography

Superb choreography and you know it's successful when the cast make movement and dances seem almost effortless. Tremendous confidence and precision in the moves and plenty of diversity for the obviously well-drilled performers. Having an 'upper' and 'lower' deck allowed for extra space and creativity which was used well. In addition to the dances (and the tap dancing really was incredible!) there were other well-choreographed moments that caught my eye such as the swaying to Bon Voyage on both the upper and lower deck, the kiss and swoon between Hope and Billy when they are first alone, and the static poses held at the end of Act 1.

Stage Direction

Stage direction was of the highest order, incorporating lots of lovely touches; managing a talented cast with great skill, smoothly and inconspicuously handled. The plot was clear, and the cast were well drilled in both staging and text. Blessed with plenty of stage area, it was used well and even when the entire cast was on show, never looked overcrowded. The various entrances and exits as well as scene changes were slick and minimal and amusing moments in the script used to add comedy - Moonshine stepping out of laundry basket, Erma and Moonshine hiding in the cabin with guns and bottles hidden and pretending to pray, the 'confessions' scene and the finale wedding scene.

Performers

Reno

Such an incredible mixture of talent – in dance, song and acting – and you delivered all of these with what appeared to be effortless ease. Add to that, the sheer energy, comedic timing and you totally owned the part. It was hard to take our eyes off you. You had plenty of support from your Angels and ensemble but you were always at the forefront. From the moment you started the evening with ‘I get a kick out of you’ to ‘The Gypsy In Me’ you never once faltered from excellence.

Billy

The one who tried to hold everything together whilst stowing away on board. You demonstrated great versatility as a performer, singing with aplomb and dancing with dexterity. You showed tremendous energy against a backdrop of suitable angst and cheekiness which won us over. Great stage presence and you entertained us throughout.

Hope

The debutant and English rose, you demonstrated some lovely dancing skills and your sweet singing voice captured the grace and glamour of the period. I liked the way you were a much more subdued character when with Evelyn but really lit up and showed your true self with Billy – we could sense your inner turmoil over love and conflicting loyalties.

Evelyn

The toff Lord Evelyn Oakleigh and fun to watch! You captured the upper crustness well and used good physical movement to suit the part. You wore those outrageous costumes with gusto! It was great watching you almost evolve from the seasick buffoon to then singing The Gypsy In Me with very comical pseudo sexy dancing!

Elisha

Billy’s boomerily idiotic boss from the start to the finish. You flitted about in myopic fashion, thus falling just short of being almost seedy, and added a touch of real humour to the role. Strong singing vocals.

Evangeline

You were the archetypal fortune hunting mother and made us smile as you swanned around in a state of self-absorption and status-obsession. Highly strung, you were convincingly unaware of any wrongdoing on your part to fail to put daughter's happiness before your own. Well portrayed.

Moonface

You used your voice and physicality well to convey the rather bumbling gangster, including the mock swagger. You brought some real humour to your part and you brandished your weapon with convincing ineffectuality! I really enjoyed Be Like The Bluebird where you made the song yours and added another dimension to your character.

Erma

You brought verve and sassiness to the stage whenever you appeared. You used your body in a saucy way and faced the audience so we could appreciate your facial expressions too. The epitome of a gal who loved life and you rendered a great version of Buddy Beware which you belted out in a powerful voice.

Captain and Purser

Trying vainly to keep command of all the unfolding events on your ship – not as you expected the voyage to be! Some good one liners and worked well as a pair.

Spit and Dippy

Superb comedy duo, you made great sidekicks and teamed together well, acting as foils for each other.

Angels

The four angels really added layers to scenes and dances with good vocals, and were an able quartet to back Reno with convincing dubiety.

Ensemble and Tap Team

Chorus work was very smooth and each member played their own particular characters faultlessly; the company performed excellently as an ensemble. An awesome tap team with a showstopper tap dance at the end of Act 1.

Other Cast Members

The four singing sailors were able to showcase some strong vocals and Henry Dobson to add more comedy. Other smaller parts such as the barman, reporters, cameraman, FBI agents and the old lady in the wheelchair added well to the cast.

It was evident that this production was the end result of months of hard work. Everyone on stage, speaking or not, performing or not, stayed in role, smiles were ever present and there was always a sense of enjoyment and energy.

This show was seriously worthy of the West End, you are all to be congratulated and should be very proud of yourselves.

Thank you for your hospitality – good luck with your new temporary venue – and I look forward to seeing future shows.