

NODA Review

CHICAGO, HIGH SCHOOL EDITION

VIVA Youth

King's Theatre, Newmarket.

The Bob Fosse, Kander and Ebb musical, is about two killers who escape the noose to sing and dance in Vaudeville.

Adapted to be content-appropriate and flexible, *Chicago: High School Edition* removes overtly sexual references and adult language. If you think that this version of Chicago, The Musical, is void of any of the original elements—murder, greed, corruption, violence, exploitation, adultery, and treachery, fear not. With the exception of a couple of songs that have been eliminated, and dialogue changed here and there, it is just as cynical and witty as the original production.

The triumvirate of Director Daniel Schumann, Musical Director Richard Hayward and Choreographer Jess Clifford are second to none. The skill with which they bring out the best in young casts is nothing short of amazing.

The setting and costumes were black with touches of white running through the theme worked well, enhanced as they were by an extremely interesting lighting design by Nigel Thompson (We are Blueshed). Costumes (Brenda Rose) and Hair and Wigs (Angela Schumann) were first-rate and the challenge of producing all black furniture and props were in the very capable hands of Heather & Mike Goodwin, Anne Bevan and Rob Barton. The many scene changes managed by Stage Manager Maggie Brackenridge and her team were slick and extremely quiet.

The excellent Orchestra high up on stage handled the intricate and varied score superbly and proceeded to lead the cast through the host of well-known numbers that form this popular musical. At this point, I should say that the sound balance was questionable in a couple of places when under scoring dialogue which was a shame.

The show has good major roles with two female leads, Roxie and cabaret singer and accused murderer Velma Kelly; two male leads Billy Flynn and Amos, Roxie's husband and a host of strong supporting roles. Added to this is a need for a large Ensemble of singers and dancers.

The two murderesses Roxie Hart (Riley Williams) and Velma Kelly (Kiera O'Reilly) are both excellent actresses and both have great voices whether in their solo numbers "Roxie" or Velma's "I Can't Do It Alone" or in their duets such as "My Own Best Friend". These two were well-cast and the animosity between Roxie and Velma was very well brought out. Two very fine performances.

The role of Billy Flynn was shared over the six performances between Ben Clark and Olly Manley. Both are fine actors as well as singers, skills needed in this role.

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Ben being marginally older and more experienced was suitably sleazy and was in fine voice throughout, his fun “duet” with Roxie “We Both Reached for the Gun” was great. “Razzle Dazzle” of course was a real crowd pleaser.

Olly gave a more laid-back mercenary approach to the role, which I thought worked well, with a good singing voice and nimble footwork as demonstrated in his renditions of “All I Care About” and “Razzle Dazzle”. This was an excellent portrayal.

The role of Amos was also shared. This time between Joseph Beach and Joseph Hall. Once again both brought their own interpretation to the role.

In a great characterisation Joseph Beach was truly believable as the down trodden Amos Hart. How good must it make an actor feel, when he finishes a number and gets an “Aaww” from the audience, before they break out into well-deserved applause? This is exactly what happened at the end his “Mr Cellophane”.

A very capable and confident performance from Joseph Hall as Amos. Joseph managed to get the laughs as well as the sympathy from the audience in equal measure. The character was pitched perfectly and the comic timing was flawless.

Dresden Goodwin gave a very strong performance as Matron “Mama” Morton with a great rendition of “When You’re Good to Mama”. Another strong performance was given by Mark O’Reilly as MC/Harry. In fact credit must be given to all the minor principals taking part in the numerous scenes throughout. Katie Kirkpatrick, as the reporter Mary Sunshine, Jordan Thorpe as Fred together with and Rori Saxby (Kitty), Dylan Cardwell (Fogarty) and Sam Laws (Judge). Mention too must be made of the girls involved in the “Cell Block Tango”, Elisha Cardwell (Annie), Eloise George (Mona), Emma Gilbey (Hubyak), Zara Minns (June), Phoebe Noble (Liz).

The hard-working Dance Team who took on the more accomplished choreography were great so name-checks for them all: Tara Gilbey, Aaron Lord, Holly Pryke, Azaria Thomas, Zack Wymer, Rori Saxby and Mark O’Reilly. Completing this fine cast were the eight members of the Ensemble Macey Bennett, Megan Godfrey, Sennett Goodwin, Hannah Kirk, Ruby Leonard, Tzarina Payton Cooper, Aquila Smith and Naomi Stiddard.

Excellent work from this young cast. The singing and dancing was outstanding throughout and performed to the standard of experienced adults. The execution of the choreography particularly was nothing short of breathtaking and Choreographer Jess Clifford must have been bursting with pride with the way it was handled.

Congratulations to Director Daniel Schumann and everyone at Viva on an excellent show.

Julie Petrucci

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