

***Hi-de-Hi*** by Paul Carpenter and Ian Gower,  
adapted from the original TV series by Jimmy Perry and David Croft  
Performed by Viva at The Performing Arts Centre, Soham Village College.

The prolific group which is Viva this time gave us *Hi-De-Hi*, a show not without its own challenges as the TV comedy characters are well-known and the play requires several settings: a Radio Maplin's Desk, an area of the Hawaiian Ballroom, a bar, and dual settings for the Staff Room/Geoffrey's office and two staff chalets. This type of show also runs a tightrope for a director who has to satisfy the purists and also convince a new and perhaps younger audience...As you'd expect, *Hi-De-Hi* retains the original characters and the plot cherry picks the best situations and gags from the series.

Director Frank Crosby dispensed with the usual welcome by Maplin's Yellow Coats, replacing them with Jacen Bruce who entertained the gathering "campers" with songs of the 1950s and had those waiting for the doors to open joining in songs, getting everyone in the mood. Jacen returned at the curtain call for the cast to join him in the famous *Hi-de-Hi* tv theme.

The show was performed without a set in front of blacks. This fazed me slightly as I have seen sets used before at this venue and I asked the reason behind it. A decision had been made to create the six required acting areas with the use of lighting and this worked well. In fact technically with a couple of first night blips everything worked well.

For me personally I think the two chalets needed to have some sort of dividing wall as the scene which includes the wallpapering of Yvonne and Barry's chalet didn't work. It may have done if the actors had stood with their backs to the audience holding the wallpaper which they were endeavouring to hang or work out the pattern on but the joke was lost. Another decision was made to switch the chalet scene at the end of Act 1 to the beginning of Act 2 and run it consecutively with the opening chalet scene there. This meant that Jeffrey had no time to get into bed and appear to sleep "in the buff" as he had to stay fully clothed.

Costumes and make-up were very good. Trouble had been taken to recreate the famous uniforms. The Yellowcoats, Sylvia (**Tara Gilbey**), Tracey (**Justine Whitworth**), Dawn (**Steph Gilbey**), Betty (**Sarah Boor**) and Gary (**David Burchell**) all looked splendid and did a good job managing to keep smiling and friendly.

All the famous well-loved characters of the show were there. Leading the comedy stakes and, looking almost Ruth Madoc's spitting image was **Amanda Aldridge**, playing the "man-mad" head Yellowcoat, Gladys Pugh well. The Welsh accent was great in the Radio Maplin scenes but wavered slightly at times. Gladys has her sights on the holiday camp director, Jeffrey Fairbrother, excellently played by **Rob Barton** in a fine dithering and hesitant manner. For me, the reading of Joe Maplin's letters was a bit speedy and upstaged by Peggy's miming. Then there were the camp's "toffs" - snobbish ballroom dancers Yvonne and Barry Stuart Hargreaves (**Chloe Grimes** and **Paul Coghlan**) adding to the fun with their barbed sense of humour! The camp's two comedians were in the safe hands of **Steven Beach** who interacted with the audience nicely as earthy Ted Bovis and **David Blyth** as the sensible level-headed Spike. **Vaughan Moll** was the Punch and Judy man who hates children and has a grumble for every occasion, and then some! His

explanation for hitting a youngster was highly amusing, and ex-horse jockey Fred (**Geoff Fisher**) threw in his tuppence worth superbly. **Kate Weekes** played Peggy, the chalet maid, striving to achieve her dream of becoming a Yellowcoat. I did have trouble with Peggy delivering her lines directly to the audience particularly when she was telling the Yellowcoats of finding Gladys' bra in Jeffrey's office. We also enjoyed nice cameo performances from **Kate Nolan** as Hilary Bovis Ted's ex-wife and **Peter Crussell** as Mr Pritchard a holidaying police sergeant.

Viva gave the very receptive first night audience a nice dose of nostalgia and good old fashioned, if a tad non PC, humour, sending everyone home with the TV theme tune ringing in their ears. Thanks Viva - Ho de Ho!

Julie Petrucci

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