

BRASSED OFF

Viva.

It's not often that an amateur company presents a play featuring an entire brass band, but that was what Viva did in performing Paul Allan's '*Brassed Off*'. This company always seem to push itself just that little bit further to produce something exciting and insightful and *Brassed Off* delivered both.

Set ten years after the year-long strike in 1984–85 by the National Union of Mineworkers in Britain, Paul Allen's stage adaptation of *Brassed Off* looks back in anger to 1994 when the Tories were still enthusiastically shutting down coal mines. The loss of hope, pride and fighting spirit in what were previously proud mining communities was the basis for the idea of being "brassed off"

It was great to see the Soham Comrades Brass Band on stage as the Grimley Colliery Band, integrating so well into the production. They were complemented by a company of actors who had clearly put a tremendous effort into their roles, not only assimilating natural-sounding Yorkshire accents, but also doing convincing imitations of brass band musicians.

There was a very atmospheric opening when the Women Against Mine Closure paraded with their banners one of which was used as a screen for black and white stills from the miners' strike accompanied by the lone voice of ELLIE GILLET. Whilst the stage was still dark up came the men from the pit, the whole band and cast dressed as miners with lamps lit on their helmets.

The story is then taken up by Young Shane played by ALFIE PECKHAM. Except for a tendency to rush lines, this young actor handled the role well. He interacted with the older cast members in a natural and confident performance which belied his years.

DARREN SMITH (Phil), STEVE PERRY (Jim), GEOFF FISHER (Harry) and WILL CAHILL (Andy) were totally and utterly believable as workmates. The relationship between Jim and Harry, so much so you could well believe they had been mates for ever. A real pair of rogues.

There were some fine performances too from MANDY MORRISH (Rita) and SUE PERRY (Vera) as the wives of Harry and Jim. The interaction between Vera, Rita, Harry and Jim was excellent. There were some highly amusing moments from these four.

Sandra and Phil are the couple with a young family, no money, several children, relying on handouts from friends and past sell-by date food from the supermarket. Both SOPHIE PLACHCINSKI and DARREN SMITH handled these roles well - the desperation of their plight was heartbreaking.

AMY NOONAN as Gloria brought a breath of fresh air to the scene, rekindling a past relationship with Andy and a new enthusiasm for band practice from the older men. A good strong performance this in a far from easy role. WILL CAHILL was great as Andy, putting up with his co-workers ragging and Gloria's return to his life with aplomb. This was a good believable pairing.

Then there was Danny, played with fervour by DAVID TICKNER. If you want emotion, David's your man. This was a great portrayal of the Band's dedicated conductor.

All the supernumeraries, including the young children, played their parts well and gave great support to the production as a whole.

The set design by PHILLIP MIDGLEY was great and depicted as it needed to the top of the mine shaft and the miners' homes which was enhanced by WIM ROOSE'S fine lighting design. I liked the spot down front for the mini-monologues of the miners and their wives - which they all found nicely. Costumes (by DELIA TICKER) were good in spite of the odd anachronism. Finding boiler suits and miner's helmets for the whole cast and entire band must have been a big challenge. Compliments to EMMA SAMPFORD for the make-up - particularly Phil's.

This talented group did a sterling job with a subject which still stirs strong emotion even now, many years after the events on which the story is based. Congratulations to directors KEITH GALLOIS and JUDITH COLLINGSWOOD, ALISON O'CONNOR VIVA and SOHAM COMRADES BRASS BAND for taking on the challenge of this play - it was a resounding success.

Julie Petrucci

Regional Representative NODA East District Four South.