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Review of Viva's 'Evita' at The Brook in Soham on Thursday 10th March 2016

For all its popularity, 'Evita', lyrics by Tim Rice and music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, is no easy musical to produce but knowing Viva was presenting it, success was assured and indeed it was a very powerful and effective show. However, this success was not only due to the expertise of the young people performing, Viva had the ghastly calamity that all amateur shows must fear – the lead singer, Evita (Becky Bush), developed laryngitis a few nights before the opening night. Did they panic or even cancel the show? Not a bit of it and with all the panache of a professional theatrical company, 'the show must go on', the clichéd cry of all thespians, was fulfilled. The hero of the day – the director / producer and the founder of Viva – Dan Schumann - came to the rescue and at only a few day's notice rang round his contacts in London and discovered Katie Shearman, who stepped in at the breach. She stood in with the band and sang the part perfectly, while Becky showed real talent as an actress and played her role faultlessly, miming the words while Katie sang. You would hardly have known that there had been a problem.

The band accompaniment, acting, singing, dancing, choreography, sound, lights, set, costumes, videos - you name it, were spot on. Ben Clarke, with a phenomenal singing voice, was a believable cynic 'Che' commenting on the rise of Eva Perón. Lee Sherwood was the epitome of the strong dictator Perón, Zara Minns gave a moving performance of a heart-broken mistress while Daniel Lane was the swathe seductive but callous singer Magaldi, Eva's first 'love'.

The depth of feeling, the brilliant colour and grace of chic upper class Buenos Aires, the upright tenor of the generals, the potency of the ensembles and the wow factor of the little children all helped shape a memorable show. An undercurrent of intrigue and struggle for political power and the determination of Eva to reach the dizzy heights of world fame were ever-present. They all integrated seamlessly into the whirlwind action on stage that swept us off our feet and into the realms of political Argentina.

This was indeed a highly powerful and mesmerising show worthy of any professional group. It was hard to believe that this was an 'amateur' show.

For more information about this amazing group see: www.viva-group.org.uk