

REVIEW : NOMADS - Annie - Kings Theatre Newmarket 20th - 27th June 2009

It is the strength of the performers working together this week at The Kings Theatre in Newmarket, which culminates in a great show for the latest production from NOMADS. It is also the team work of Charles Strouse, Thomas Meehan and Martin Charnin, who originally put together the musical adaptation of 'Annie' - based on the comic strip - 'Little Orphan Annie'.

Set in New York City in 1933, Annie, is an orphan abandoned by her parents, eleven years previously on the steps of an orphanage run by Miss Hannigan. The wealthy business man Oliver Warbucks, offers to take Annie to his home for Christmas. A very influential man, he tries various means of finding her parents, to no avail, but Annie and Warbucks have found soul mates in each other.

Gemma Hunt, as Annie - has the power to bring the whole show together with such a spirited performance, and a beautiful voice for the, now evergreen, 'Tomorrow'. She has a naive charm and touches the hearts of all she encounters, from the orphanage girls right through to the President of the United States.

Andy Ward is superb as the sophisticated, sartorial and yet, soft hearted, Oliver Warbucks and these two interact in a magical way, and musically, they blend beautifully together. Of course, no show based in New York, would be complete without Kate Nolan, who is a natural to this genre, and as Miss Hannigan, gives one of her best performances ever - especially, 'Easy Street' together with Rooster and Lily (Zander Fletcher and Mikeala Eggleton).

Grace Farrell, Oliver Warbucks personal assistant is played and sung beautifully by Dani Scharpf; she has great warmth and poise on stage and gives a most believable performance working with Annie and Warbucks. The rest of the staff are excellent and particular mention to Drake the very English Butler played with aplomb and humour by John Mitchell. The Orphans certainly have enough enthusiasm to overflow their buckets. 'Annie' would not be the same without a great team of orphans, and these orphans are great. Along with the very cute Mollie, they really do have the 'aah' factor!

Wallace Wareham, directs the show, and as always, has that certain knack of bringing out the best and setting before us a finished product which shines with obvious enjoyment from the cast and excellent costumes. It is a production 'team' which is excellently stage-managed, by Gail Baker, as there are a multitude of scene changes.

Choreography, by Andy Thorpe is outstanding with some great routines and the youngsters are so animated and enthusiastic, with 'It's a Hard Knock life'. The radio show is an amusing interlude with 'You're never fully dressed without a smile', along with Liam Corbett as Bert Healy, and who could forget the ventriloquist and his dummy, or the Boylan sisters. Eric Maguire heads a splendid White House line-up, as President Roosevelt. Dr. Craig Sayers is Musical Director and keeps all the feet tapping with that certain oomph factor, which completes this brilliant presentation.

Just one disappointment - though this is in the writing and not the performances - what happened to 'Sandy' the abandoned dog - played by the wonderful 'Sampson'? He loved being on stage and played his part magnificently, I kept waiting for him to be reunited with Annie - However, Wallace Wareham can rest assured that after the first night, the audience did leave the theatre 'smiling, humming the wonderful music and delighted.....'

Jancis Harvey

