

NODA Review by Phil Melia of Stepping Out

Date 14th May 2025

Society Newmarket Operatic Musical & Dramatic Society (NOMADS)

Venue Kings Theatre, Newmarket **Type of Production** Musical

Director Mandy Morrish **Musical Director** Will Cahill **Choreographer** Jess Clifford

Written By Based on original play by Richard Harris

The Kings Theatre in Newmarket provided an ideal intimate setting for NOMADS to transform the stage into a quintessential English community hall. The set design, with its drab backcloth adorned with window features, a large pinboard, a bench, some chairs, and a piano, effectively established the scene for "Stepping Out the Musical." This charming show deftly captures the essence of a community coming together through the seemingly mundane, yet profoundly engaging world of an adult tap class.

We were treated to the delights of Rose, portrayed by Cat Blacker, who brought charm and passion to the village hall community. Her section at the start of "What I Want" was one of the standout moments in Act Two, showcasing her vocal talents and engaging presence. Sharing the stage with her were Alice Turner as the gum-chewing, two left footed, flirtatious Sylvia, and Karen Thorpe as the boisterous on the outside, vulnerable on the inside Maxine. Both actresses embraced their roles with zest, delivering some of the most humorous lines of the production. This trio left me wanting more and could have easily amplified their characterisations further, adding even more vivacity to their performances.

Desperately trying to be part of this trio was the nervous Dee, portrayed by Joe Ward, who delivered an outstanding performance as the socially awkward character attempting to fit in with the confident trio. Lynne, one of the more adept tap dancers yet lacking in self-assurance, was subtly and effectively played by Jay Hopper. Their duet "Love To" was particularly enjoyable, showcasing their individual talents. Bravo to both performers for this delightful number!

One of the more intriguing dynamics in the performance was the relationship between Geoffrey (Jason Ware), the sole male in the tap class, and Andy (Freya Morrish), a timid woman trapped in a loveless marriage. Ware's portrayal of Geoffrey, who sought solace in dance following the tragic loss of his wife to cancer, was deeply moving. His rendition of "Not Quite" effectively conveyed his character's grief and vulnerability.

Morrish shined in Act Two, gradually revealing the turmoil she faced at home with a nuanced and heartfelt performance. Her powerful singing voice, while impressive, at times seemed to overpower the character's shy persona, particularly during her duet with Geoffrey of "Never Feel the Same Again." Nonetheless, the emotional depth she brought to the role was commendable.

Mavis (Maddie McIntyre), the class's leader and a former professional dancer, struggled with her students' lack of skill and external pressures. McIntyre did well in Act Two to develop her back story, culminating in an emotional release, shouting at all the tap class. This was particularly powerful. First night nerves were evident, leading to occasional tuning issues.

Anita Marshall deserves special recognition for her portrayal of Mrs. Fraser. Although she did not participate in the dancing and only had a few moments in the spotlight, her role behind the piano added a delightful comic relief to the performance. Her character's quirks and timing reminded me of Victoria Wood's Acorn Antiques. She consistently got the loudest laughs from the audience.

The standout performance of the evening was undoubtedly Esther McIntyre as Vera, the posh character with a touch of OCD who yearns to belong while concealing her personal struggles. McIntyre's portrayal was consistently believable, culminating in the powerful song "Loving Him" at the end of Act Two. This number, performed alongside Mavis and Andy, poignantly revealed

the emotional turmoil each character faced beyond the confines of their community hall tap class.

The gradual improvement in dancing ability was a real success. From the first scene, where all were dancing the similar warm-up steps but slightly out of sync (not an easy thing) to the final number, with all its glitz and glamour and a spectacle to behold. Well done to Jess Clifford for all her Choreography.

There were a few first-night technical issues with the sound with microphones being left on backstage. Hopefully a first night issue that was resolved.

Despite the first-night technical issues, "Stepping Out the Musical" proved to be a wonderfully cohesive production. Mandy Morrish (Director) and Will Cahill (Musical Director) deserve high praise for their efforts in bringing a slice of British village community life to the intimate stage of The Kings Theatre in Newmarket. Their ability to bring each character to life and the gradual improvement in dancing ability was commendable. The show was a testament to the hard work and dedication of everyone involved. I eagerly anticipate NOMADS' next production, "Drinking Habits," scheduled for later in July.

© NODA CIO. All rights reserved.