

East Surrey Operatic Society: Review

Performance: Anything Goes

Review by: Joanna Silcox (NODA) / Tony Flook Surrey Mirror

East Surrey Operatic Society (ESOS), The Harlequin, Redhill.



This was a brilliant production of a perennial Cole Porter favourite. Originally adapted from a book by PG Wodehouse and Guy Bolton it contains many well known song and dance numbers, typical Wodehouse characters and humour, and the backdrop of a cruise liner - an excellent choice for the company's 'big splash' Centenary production.

Lydia Easton's direction was of the highest order, incorporating lots of lovely touches; she managed her talented cast with great skill. Musical Director, Angela Barker, captured the 1930s mood perfectly - she led her

spirited band with distinction - the standard of the singing was extremely high from both chorus and principals. Lively and appropriate choreography was supplied by Louise Wright; it was great to see the whole cast executing a well drilled tap dancing finale.

Stage management was smoothly and inconspicuously handled by Ross Savage and his team. The quality of the sound - it depends on so many factors and frequently is the area least well handled in amateur theatre - was perfect, thanks to Jeremy Covell. Effective lighting by Ian Fagg combined with a splendid set by Scenic Projects created a series of wonderful backdrops from romantic balmy evenings to hot razzmatazz and glitz. Properties were well handled by Jenny Toye and her team.

Wardrobe (Sue Bracher and Elizabeth Elliott) was colourful, elegant and thoroughly appropriate for the time and location although I felt that Lord Evelyn's underwear should have been much more extreme. Hair and makeup were attractive and reflected the era perfectly.

Billy Crocker (Andy Lingfield) headed a fine cast, dancing and singing with great aplomb he demonstrated his versatility as a performer. Hope Harcourt, his love interest, was played by true English rose, Jenny Chantelle Clarke; with fine singing voice she captured the grace and glamour of the period.

They made a most convincing and charming couple. Francis Radford as Moonface Martin brandished his weapon with great humour and convincing ineffectuality; his especially shaven head served to emphasise the swivelling eyes of true gangster! He was very ably assisted by Alys Dreux as Erma, who brought verve and sassiness to the stage whenever she appeared.

Juliette Ewbank played Reno Sweeney, the nightclub singer, with impressive conviction - it is hard to believe that she is a newcomer to the amateur stage. She was ably backed by her quartet of "angels"- Purity, Chastity, Charity, Virtue (Rebekah Allen, Jill Day, Fiona Radford, Fiona Thompson) with convincing dubiety.

Her eventual partner, Sir Evelyn Oakleigh, was portrayed by Chris Whitebread. He acted and sang well and achieved an upper-class gent and but was a bit too 'normal' for my taste.

David Longes as Elisha Whitney flitted about in myopic fashion and added a touch of real professional humour and Sally Hatton as Mrs Harcourt was a typical fortune hunting mother. Smaller parts were ably filled, with particular credit to the Chinese converts, Luke and John,

played by Heather Stasiw and Tina Campey. Chorus work was very smooth and each member played their own particular characters faultlessly; the company performed excellently as an ensemble.

Special mention must be made of Cheeky, played by Keane, who made a significant contribution to the overall effect; he had been faultlessly drilled by his owner and trainer Suzanne Phillips. It is said that one should never perform with children or animals and it was certainly true that when Keane was on the stage we had eyes for little else!

Overall this was a most entertaining production which set the highest standards. - a fitting end to the first 100 years! Very well done to all involved and very many thanks for your excellent hospitality - I am already looking forward to my next visit!

Here's to the next 100!

Joanna Silcox
NODA Rep, District 8, SE Area

Anything Goes
(2007)
Reviewed by Tony Flook
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It couldn't have been easy for ESOS to decide which musical to perform for their centenary production - yes, they first took to the stage in 1907 with *The Mikado*. As the key objective must have been to celebrate this landmark occasion *Anything Goes* was probably as good a choice as any. Although the show has next to no story, this is more than compensated by Cole Porter's unforgettable tunes and often-witty lyrics. It's really just a feast of music with barely a downbeat moment and no villain to spoil the party.

The major strength of the production, directed by Lydia Easton, was that everyone in the cast sang faultlessly and most managed to bring their character to life. Soloists delivered their numbers with feeling, duos were perfectly balanced, the male quartet brought out the best from their showcase song and the ensemble made the set pieces memorable.

Juliette Ewbank showed confidence as Reno Sweeney. She put verve into her solo, *I Get a Kick out of You* although her speaking voice and movement lost some of its potential impact by veering more towards the slinky, seductive Mae West style rather than the rasping Ethel Merman approach. She and Andy Lingfield teamed up for a lively *You're the Top* and she was equally well matched in declaring *Friendship*, with Francis Radford. These two male leads were impressive in their own right. Andy Lingfield injected life into the basically two-dimensional character of Billy Crocker and sang *Easy to Love* as if he really meant it. Francis Radford added extra personality to the show's best character role Moonface Martin, soft as a pussy-cat 'public enemy No 13'.

Jenny Chantelle Clarke looked demure and sang *Goodbye, Little Dream*, *Goodbye* sweetly as *Hope*, a part that only allowed her to hint at her acting ability. Chris Whitebread's aristocratic mask slipped when Lord Evelyn Oakleigh revealed *The Gypsy in Me*. Alys Dreux (Erma) warned off potential suitors with her no holds barred *Buddy Beware*. The full team came to the fore in a meticulously harmonised *Blow Gabriel Blow* and in the title number but apart from a brief, eye-catching, tap sequence dancing rarely captured the imagination.

One performer who was always well received was Cheeky, played by Keane, a perfectly-behaved terrier who seemed to enjoy being in the spotlight.

The overall impression was that, after a slightly slow first act, the production picked up pace in the second half and ended on a high note.

Congratulaticns to ESOS for enticing musical director Angela Barker out of 'retirement' to bring cut the best from the score - the very heart of Anything Goes.

Reviewed by Tony Flook in the Surrey Mirror