

1998 *Bells are Ringing*

Bells ring out for staging of musical comedy

The “Bells Are Ringing” in tune for the East Surrey Operatic Society’s latest production at The Harlequin Theatre, Redhill. The story by Betty Comden and Adolph Green is simple, but somewhat long in the telling as it revolves around a telephone answering service punctuated by sub-plots underlining the main story. The music by Jule Styne always managed to lift the show, although a little more chorus work would have been welcome. What little there was brought rapturous applause from the full house. Musical pieces such as “Long Before I Knew You” and “The party’s Over” were expertly performed by the principal characters, and musical director Angela Barker squeezed every ounce of enjoyable sound from the actors and orchestra.

One of the sub-plots involved a bookmaker using the telephone service to disguise his betting business but he attracts the attention of the manageress of the answering service. In this sketch Pat Felstead and Peter Benthom complemented each other with their strong performances as they both extracted the maximum amount of humour. Another sub-plot involves two policemen intent on closing down the telephone service, played *à la Clouseau* by Philip Felstead and Steve Bonett. Frederick Harrison displayed his wide singing range as a zany dentist in yet another plot.

The main story is about one of the telephonists, Carol Hunt who was for me the star of the evening. Her singing was professional and a pleasure to hear, her acting totally believable, bringing out the humour and romance with a very high standard performance.

Terry Foster played Jeff Moss with a beautifully relaxed singing voice and his interpretation of “Long Before I Knew You” was one of the highlights.

The choreography was expertly arranged by Nikki Owen and Gillian Jarvis once again displayed a strong director’s control over what is not an easy show to stage.

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