

NICE TO HAVE YOU BACK!

Well “Hello Dolly”! She was very welcome in Redhill Market Hall last week and packed them in, thanks to the efforts of The East Surrey Operatic Society. I have never been sure whether this show (taken from the book by Michael Stewart), adds to the ingenious play by Thornton Wilder – “The Matchmaker” – or distracts from it. Opinions are divided but on the whole, in spite of some inspired music contained therein (by Jerry Herman), I feel that quite a lot of the original subtle humour is lost. However, “Dolly” is still a fun, spectacular musical, colourful and stimulating; providing it is presented well of course, as it certainly was here. This experienced society tackled the show with imagination and the opening scene was lively, depicting Fourth Avenue, New York City, with some excellent chorus work and pleasing costume. The singers were backed beautifully by the orchestra conducted by Colin Copestake. This was the backbone of the production.

Patricia Felstead as Dolly was well cast and gradually fitted into the role as the evening progressed. A little more flamboyance was perhaps called for, giving her more stage presence, but on the whole she showed much understanding of the character. Her voice is good, but sometimes drowned by the orchestra and at times there was little compatibility. However, one expects teething troubles on the first night and generally Dolly came over with a likable conviction, and she never failed to retain her American accent.

Fred Harrison as Horace Vandergelder was always convincing and has a very pleasing voice. He was wise enough never to overact and that is the secret of getting the most out of this character. Cornelius Hacker was played by Vic Ruocca, a new member of the society. A lively performance with good stage projection, very popular with the audience and he complemented Christopher Wait as Barnaby Tucker extremely well. This was Christopher’s first main principal role and he handled it with commendable confidence, stage presence will come with experience.

Special mention must be made of Gillian Jarvis’s portrayal of Irene Molloy. This was a delightful characterisation. A lovely part, but it can be mishandled. Sally Frost as Minnie was also most likeable. The show had some weak moments, such as the rather unconvincing and mistimed explosions in Vandergelder’s store (this probably righted itself as the week went on.) Scenery was also not too impressive, but the all-important one, in the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant, was, considering the restrictions of the stage, exceptionally well handled and very well lit.

There were also some outstanding moments. The Parade, bringing the first Act to an exciting finale, was a credit to all concerned, particularly the dancers, and the clowns perfected the atmosphere. The court scene was good and “It Only Takes A Moment” delightfully delivered, but there were two triumphs. The Waiters’ Galop, carried out with outstanding timing and obviously rehearsed to perfection. This was a joy and brought a delighted reaction from the audience. The whole show hangs on this scene

and we were not disappointed. Dolly, looking magnificent, timed her entrance beautifully and members of the chorus excelled themselves. The audience were joining in with “Hello Dolly” – a sure sign of success.

Produced by Sheila Searing, “Dolly” filled even the inadequate, limited Market Hall with music and laughter.

Molly Shaw