

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society ; Sainsbury Singers
Production ; "CAROUSEL"
Date ; Saturday 17th May 2014
Venue ; Hexagon Theatre, Reading
Report by ; Henry Hawes – NODA Representative – Area 13

On Saturday 17th May 2014, I was delighted to accept an invitation to review Sainsbury Singers latest production "Carousel" at the Hexagon Theatre. Over the years as NODA Rep' I have reviewed many "Carousel's" of varying degrees of presentation, and I must be honest my feelings for this particular show had become jaded, but the standard of this production renewed my feelings for this show, so I thank all who were involved with it. The show had a good pace throughout so at no time did it flag. The opening sequence during the prologue really set the scene for what was to follow and the use of atmospheric lighting in place of scenery was inspired.

Sara El-Hanfy – (JULIE JORDAN) – It is essential in this show that you have a good leading lady who can portray the various emotions from stubbornness, love, despair and courage and **Sara** gave us all of these. Her relationship with her friend Carrie was a joy and her love and courage in respect of her one true love Billie could not have been bettered. Vocally **Sara** presented a good melodic voice which blended well with Carrie and Billy in the numbers "Mister Snow" and "If I Loved You" – Congratulations.

Lucy Hutson – (CARRIE PIPPERIDGE) – **Lucy** gave us an enjoyable Carrie. Her friendship and concern for her friend Julie was well shown and her relationship with Mister Snow was most believable, her flirtation ship towards him could not have been bettered. Vocally she came across well in the duet with Mr Snow, "When The Children Are Asleep" a well sung duet bringing out all the feelings – Congratulations.

Catherine Hannan – (Mrs MULLIN) – As a character role this could not have been bettered by **Catherine**. She was the hard-bitten, blousy Carousel proprietor who was desperate to retain Billy's services knowing that he was the 'Goose that laid the golden egg' as far as her business was concerned and did everything in her power to attract him back. A well presented characterisation.

Stephen Cox – (BILLY BIGALOW) – This part requires a good actor and a strong singer and this we had with **Stephen**. His initial wooing of Julie to his eventual antagonism towards her was well done. This role has only three main numbers to sing, namely two solos and a duet which stretches the ability of any performer. First we have the duet with Julie "If I Loved You" which was reprised at the end of the second act, but sung with feeling and emotion. The other solo is probably one of the longest and most difficult solo in any musical namely the "Soliloquy" and **Stephen** gave it full justice, I haven't heard it sung better – Congratulations.

Emma Reeves – (NETTIE FOWLER) – **Emma** was responsible of taking Julie and Billy in when they first got married and showed her concern over Billy's attitude towards his wife. This was a nicely presented character and who lent her excellent singing voice to the number "*June is Bustin' Out All Over*" which with the full chorus was one of the high spots of the show.

Brian Bretney – (ENOCH SNOW) – As the respectable and reliable fisherman who intends to expand his business to impress Carrie who he has fallen in love with, **Brian** performed this part very well and his reaction when he discovered Jigger Craigin flirting with his intended was well portrayed. His duet with Carrie "*When The Children Are Asleep*" gave us two voices which blended well in this number – Well done.

Marek Rakowski – (JIGGER CRAIGIN) – **Marek** as 'Jigger Craigin' was suitably evil and vicious and his manipulation of 'Billy' to join him in robbing 'Mr Bascombe' was well portrayed with good acting. He also lent his excellent singing voice to such numbers as "*Blow High, Blow Low*" and "*Geraniums in the Winder*" – Well done.

Chris Reeves – (Mr BASCOMBE) – As the mill owner **Chris** struck just the right note in this characterisation being suitably stern and authoritative dismissing two of his workforce, namely 'Julie' and 'Carrie' for failing to be in by 9.00pm. He was also believable when faced with 'Billy' and 'Jigger' who attempted to rob him.

Chris Thomas – (POLICEMAN) – This is a nice little Cameo role of which **Chris** made the most of. He was the American Policeman of the period who only appears in the first act – Well done.

Michael Schult – (HEAVENLEY FRIEND) – As the 'Heavenly Friend' who directs 'Billy Bigalow' after his demise and ascends to Heaven, **Michael** gave a good interpretation of this role, being a stern critic of 'Billy's' activities on earth but at the same time feeling sorry for him and subsequently escorts him back to earth for one day so that he can see his daughter. This was a well presented role.

Gordon Wyard – (STARKEEPER) – This minor role only appears in the second act and was well played by **Gordon** making this person a believable character.

Rosie Sumner – (LOUISE) – This character only appears towards the end of the performance as the grown up daughter of 'Billie Bigalow'. **Rosie** presents an extended dance routine in which she displays all the emotions from anger, rejection, and un-happiness together with the feeling of a social outcast. This talented young lady gave a bravura performance in this routine.

Gareth Wells – (ENOCH SNOW Jr.) – This young man portrayed the character of 'Enoch Snow Jr' very well. His choreographic movements were well danced and his miming was well displayed. This young man displayed considerable talent – Well done.

Chorus of Carnival Characters, Dancers and Inhabitants of a Fishing Village on the New England Coast – This was a good Sainsbury Singers chorus who made a well balanced sound

being precise and well controlled with spot-on entries in their musical numbers in particular the two chorus numbers “*A Real Nice Clambake*” and “*You’ll Never Walk Alone*”. Movement about the stage and in the choreographic numbers was good all of which added a great deal to the overall excellence of the show – Well done.

Children (Kidz Alive Members) in the Prologue, Ballet and Snow Family (Saturday)

Louis Antell, Poppy Antell, Amy Hale, Olivia Marshall, Emma Pamment, Arthur Reeves, Lawrence Reeves, Laura Schult, Madelyn Wellstead, Lauren Wellstead, Amelia Wilson, Freya Wilson – **Kidz Alive** is the youth section of the Sainsbury Singers formed in 2003 and their use in this production brought a new look to the show.. Due to the regulations concerning children in performance it is necessary to have a double cast over a period of four nights and the above group was used on the Saturday night of my attendance so I am unable to report on the other group. This particular group certainly entered into the spirit of this production being involved in the opening prologue, the ballet sequence and the children of Mr Snow – Well done to all of you and I am sure the other group was as good.

Wendy Carne – (PRODUCER) – This was an excellent production which restored my faith in “*Carousel*”. **Wendy** had incorporated a number of innovations which brought the show up fresh and new and ranged from the use of children from **Kidz Alive** in the Prologue, Ballet and ‘Snow Family’, a new interpretation of the Carousel which was probably one of the best I have seen, but most impressionable was dispensing with scenery and using a lighting plot which ensured a most atmospheric production. Acting could not be faulted with all principals being well rehearsed in their various characters and the positioning of chorus and principals, faultless – Congratulations on a first-class production.

Trevor Defferd – (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) – **Trevor** had gathered together a fine group of musicians who played the music sensitively with a good tone and balance, not overpowering the performers but being an integral part of the performance. All principals and chorus had been well rehearsed in the music with good chorus entries and well balanced voices – Well done.

Denise Schult – (CHOREOGRAPHER) – **Denise** had devised some excellent, eye-catching routines which were quite spectacular and fitted the storyline completely. Obviously a lot of hard work had gone into the rehearsals, and it showed with precise dancing from the cast – Well done.

Stage Manager & Crew – The stage manager and crew ensured this was a well managed stage throughout the performance with no visible hitches.

Lighting Designer – This was an exceptional lighting design by **Kim**. No scenery was used in this production, relying on lights to give the right atmosphere in the various scenes. In fact the lighting was so effective that you forgot there was no scenery and I felt, that it enhanced the production. The intelligent use of gobo’s gave emphasis to the various scenes and blue lamps positioned on each side of the pros arch gave an ethereal feel to certain scenes, even to a white light travelling up the back cloth indicating Billie’s soul going to heaven – Fantastic.

Lighting Crew & Follow Spot Operators – The lighting crew on the night of my visit ensured cues were well picked up with not a late one. The follow spot operators ensured that the spots were well focused and controlled.

Sound – Surprise, surprise the Hexagon sound was for once acceptable. At long last they appear to have an operator who knows how to run a sound desk, why has it taken so long? It is still not perfect but is a vast improvement. If I am being highly critical perhaps there was too much treble and not enough bass in the tone which would have made the voices sound more natural

Carousel – I was most impressed with this carousel, over the years I have seen many styles of carousels from manual ones to mechanical ones and even depicted by a lighting design, but to me, this was the best carousel I have seen consisting of individual horses, beautifully constructed with each one mounted on silent casters and manipulated by appropriately dressed stage crew creating a well maintained circle bringing a new dimension to the vision of a carousel – Brilliant.

Wardrobe – The Wardrobe Department had sourced the costumes in-house and they looked good displaying the various characters well, they also displayed the period of the musical. They also looked clean, well fitting and pressed – Well done.

Props – All the props looked as if they had been well researched looked authentic and relevant to the plot.

Make-up, Hair & Wigs – Good overall make-up which defined the various characters well with all make-up standing up well under the stage lighting looking authentic. Hair had been well styled in the period with good quality wigs being used which appeared well dressed and fitting the characters.

Programme – An excellent programme of the right size printed on good quality paper. It contained all the relevant information easily readable in subdued light and containing items of interest and good cast photographs.

Front of House – As one has come to expect with this society, Front of House staff were smartly dressed, easily identifiable, friendly and welcoming to their audience – Keep up the good work.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest production “*Carousel*”, it was a magical experience and was much enjoyed and was a fitting finale to my position as your NODA Rep’, may I wish you all success with your future shows.

Henry

Henry Hawes – NODA Representative – London Region – Area 13