

NATIONAL OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC ASSOCIATION LONDON REGION

Society ; **The Sainsbury Singers**
Production ; **"LOVE ON LINE"**
Date ; **Wednesday 31st October 2012**
Venue ; **Leighton Park School Theatre, Reading**
Report by ; **Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13**

On Wednesday 31st October 2012, I was invited to review Sainsbury Singers latest production *"Love on Line"*, presented at the Leighton Park School Theatre in Reading. This was a new musical by the team of Andy Milburn and Nia Williams, it's modern theme was built around internet dating. This new modern musical has a lot of potential but I felt the venue did not do it justice. I attended on the first night during which there were certain technical problems which should have been sorted out at the technical rehearsal and I also felt that the show was laboured, lacking fluidity, this may have been first night nerves and improved in subsequent performances, but I feel that the paying public are entitled to as good a performance on the first night as the last night. Apart from these criticisms, this show has a lot of potential. On opening the programme I was concerned in noting that the majority of the cast were named characters. It is impossible for me to review each individual character, so I hope you will have no objections if I combine some of them into appropriate groups.

Hannah Wyard - (SAM) - I understand that this was Hannah's first major role and what a role to start with. This was a role that Hannah took in her stride. As the young upperly-mobile executive she was most believable, and which resulted in her love-life being non-existent with the result she moved into the sphere of 'on-line dating'. and the story moves on from there. For a first major role, Hannah presented a lot of potential, all I will say is that try a relax more, I know it's easy for me to say sitting in the audience, but believe me I have been through it all in the past. Relaxation makes all the difference and which is transmitted to the audience. Secondly, vocally you presented a very pleasant singing voice but on occasions you needed a little more support on you higher register - Well done on your 'baptism of fire' and I hope to see more of you on stage in the future.

Sean Faulkner - (JOE)

Matt Smith - (DUDLEY) - I have combined these two as they made a good foil for each other, one the frustrated young man who is desperate for a relationship and his friend the guitar playing 'Hippy' type., These two made an impact during the performance displaying good acting ability coupled with good singing voices which came to the fore in their various musical numbers.

Tricia Goodchild - (GLENDA MAKEPEACE) - Tricia can always be relied on to give a good performance in any character in which she is cast, and this was no exception. This talented performer presented this character perfectly and there

was nothing I could fault in this characterisation. Tricia's vocal number "People Don't Dance" was, for me, the high spot of the show, a number that was beautifully delivered.

Lorraine Cox

Emma Prince

Emma Reeves - (THE OFFICE GIRLS) - These three girls were excellent, singing their close harmony numbers with precision. All three had good singing voices which blended well together and for once the voices were not distorted through the amplification. Movement in your routines were precise - A good all-round performance.

Jackie Stoffels - (SQUIGGLES) - This young lady did very well in her characterisation and I see from your biography that you were attracted to 'shiny things' and which was obviously carried over to the costume you wore on the night. Your acting ability was good, portraying your character well with good diction and projection. Vocally you presented a nice singing voice which unfortunately was distorted by the sound system. I did feel however, that you had a problem in your higher register which needed more support, although I think that the music had been scored to high for an amateur voice.

Michael Schult - (EVANGELIST)

Natalie Rouse - (CATH)

Chris Howard - (REX, Love Online Client)

Sara El Hanfy - (LOUISE, Lone Online Client)

Chris Faulkner - (CLARK, Love Online Client)

Catherine Hannan - (SOPHIE, Love Online Client) -

Brian Bretney - (GALLERY GUARD)

Michael Schult - (GALLERY GUARD)

Chris Thomas - (GALLERY GUARD)

Leslie Vought - (SALSA INSTRUCTOR) -

Sara El Hanfy - (Dancing 'GLENDA')

Chris Thomas - (Dancing 'HOWARD')

Rob Latimer - (HEATHWOOD) -

Louise Quelch - (MADRID)

Brian Bretney - (MAITRE D') - This group performed their various characters very well, popping up at various times during the run of the performance with some of them doubling up and at the same time lending their voices to the chorus numbers which were very well sung with a good balance of voices and tonal quality, although some of the entries were a little uncertain. All the various characters had been well defined leaving one in no doubt who they were.

Jessamy Vincent -)

Chris Thomas -)

Emma Reeves -)

Chris Howard -) - (SPEED DATING SOLOISTS)

Leslie Vought -)

Chris Faulkner -)

Sara El Hanfy -)

Michael Schult -)

Catherine Hannan -) - This group and the following two groups were basically chorus with many of them playing various roles and this group, together with the others made an excellent sound in the various chorus numbers with good controlled movement in the choreographic routines.

Godfrey Chigona -)

Chris Faulkner -)

Chris Howard -) - (WAITERS)

Michael Schult -)

Matt Smith -)

Chris Thomas -) - This was another group who entered into the spirit of the production. As the 'Waiters' in scene fourteen, act one, they ensured a good end to the first act which obviously took place in a restaurant. Here we had good controlled singing and movement.

Jessamy Vincent -)

Michael Schult -) - ('TILL SUNDAY' SOLOISTS)

Sara El Hanfy -) - These three members opened up the second act together with the chorus in the number "Till Sunday". This helped to set the second act with good singing from both principals and chorus.

Chorus of Commuters, Art Lovers, Salsa Dancers, Speed Daters and Shoppers - This chorus certainly entered into the spirit of this musical, playing the various characters required and lending their voices to the chorus numbers which made an excellent sound.

Kim Antell - (PRODUCER AND CHOREOGRAPHER) - To stage a musical in this school theatre must be a nightmare, its configuration does not lend itself to a normal musical format, ie; Pros arch etc; and is more suitable to an open stage performance, but would this have worked with this particular musical, I don't know. Kim had worked wonders in staging, but even so, the use of the side wings for some of the performers caused the show to be somewhat disjointed. She had selected her cast well and brought out some good characterisations. Choreography had been well thought out giving the show some attractive movements with the cast appearing to have been well rehearsed in this aspect.- Well done on presenting this musical under difficult circumstances and I would suggest that this theatre does not lend itself to musicals in the usual format.

Andy Milburn - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR and Co-writer of *Love Online*)

Nia Williams - (Co-Writer of *Love Online*) - These two obviously have a feeling for music and musical theatre and devised a new musical based on the modern

day phenomenon, 'on-line dating'. This partnership devised some tuneful music all in the modern idiom with some excellent chorus numbers in four part harmony and some good close harmony trio singing. I did feel that a little more attention needed to be given to the solo numbers, the soloists having difficulty with the upper register of their songs (could they have been transposed?) I also felt that the storyline needed a little more 'body' to it. Although in the modern idiom, at times it was a little confusing to follow. As far as the cast is concerned, they appeared to have been well rehearsed in the music, although there were a few late entries on the night of my visit, being the first night and obviously it would have improved during the course of the run - My congratulations on devising a new musical, something that is sadly lacking these days.

Stage Manager & Crew - This musical seemed to be well stage managed with swift scene changes and no apparent hitches.

Scenery - The scenery design and construction had been devised and built in-house and was tolerable for the awkward lay-out of this theatre. I wonder, taking into account the configuration of the theatre, would an open stage have worked better?

Lighting & Sound - I would imagine that lighting this production in this theatre was a challenge but one that Kim tackled and ensured that the show was properly lit. I cannot say the same for the sound operation. Both the musicians and the principals were over-amplified with the result the principals' voices were distorted. I was also concerned with feedback and what sounded like explosions as if a mike had been dropped on the floor several times, this must be disconcerting to the performers as it was to the audience and should have been sorted out at the technical rehearsal. I know I attended on the first night but I believe the first night should be as good as the last night bearing in mind that all performances are attended by the paying public and this sort of incident does not reflect favourably on the society.

Wardrobe - The majority of costumes encompassed modern dress which made this aspect easier to dress. The Wardrobe Department had done a good job in fitting the cast with costumes which encompassed their particular characters.

Props - All props used had been well sourced and looked authentic fitting the action of the show.

Make-up, Hair & Wigs - The make-up appeared to have been well applied with the correct highlights. Wigs and Hair had been styled for the period on display.

Programme - An attractive programme of the right size, it contained all the necessary information with items of interest, well laid out. I was not so sure on the use of acronyms included in the cast biographies, which can be confusing.

Front of House - The Front of House staff worked wonders in the restrictive area which passed as a foyer at this theatre and which resulted in it being very congested even with a small audience. Thank you for inviting me to review your latest production "Love on Line" and I congratulate you on taking on something different, i.e. a brand new musical. I will suggest that if you decide to do another musical outside of the Hexagon you try and source a different venue. I appreciate the difficulty in alternative venues, but I am afraid Leighton Park School Theatre does not lend itself to traditional musicals, due to its configuration. Thank you for your excellent hospitality and I wish you all success with your next production "Jekyll & Hyde"

Henry

Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13