

Pajama Game

On Saturday 26th September 2009, I was delighted to be invited to review Reading Operatic Society's latest presentation "THE PAJAMA GAME" at the Hexagon Theatre, Reading. I have always had a soft spot for this show as it was the first musical I ever directed. This show was the first of two written by Ross and Adler but unfortunately this team did not write anymore as Ross died of bronchiectasis at the age of 29, a sad loss to the musical world.

In some respects "The Pajama Game" is an odd show with a strangely unsympathetic leading lady. 'Babe' is a tart little dolly-bird who has become a factory union rep' and who wiggles her advantages at her foreman as part of a plan to score points in a wages dispute. The show contains some excellent musical numbers with 'Sid Sorokin's' baffled, 'Hey There, You With The Stars in Your Eyes'. Other catchy musical numbers include 'Babe's' scornful waltz-time insistence 'I'm Not At All In Love' and the confrontational duet with 'Sid' – 'There Once Was a Man'. One is also presented with a good description of the passion pit in 'Hernando's Hideaway' and the dance spot 'Steam Heat'. Over the years since this show first appeared it has fallen in and out of favour which I have never been able to understand as I feel that it is an enjoyable show. It has a topical theme with excellent, toe-tapping numbers, great dance routines and I have always felt it was a happy show and which came across in Reading Operatic Society's presentation. It had been well cast and staged with good singing and movement, all of which I am sure was enjoyed by the audience.

Kevin Gingell - (MYRON "OLD MAN" HASLER) - Kevin had firmly made up his mind as to what his character was to be. Right from the start he created the typical hard-headed and brash American business executive and carried the character, without flagging, throughout the entire show.

Emma Powell - (GLADYS HOTCHKISS) – I liked this characterisation by Emma, she was suitably naive which the part calls for, and she displayed good comedy timing, which was spot on. Her relationship with both 'Hines' and 'Prez' was well portrayed. Her diction was clear and precise with well pointed lines. Emma presented her various musical numbers very well with good phrasing and intonation - This was a good characterisation - Congratulations.

Howard Timberlake - (SID SOROKIN) - As the factory superintendent, new to his position, Howard gave a very good characterisation of the part. Here we had a good actor who interpreted his role very well and his stormy relationship with 'Babe Williams' was first-class. Howard had a good singing voice which blended well with 'Babe' and came to the fore in the numbers 'Hey There' and 'There Once Was a Man' - Well done.

Tanya Pratt - (CATHERINE 'BABE' WILLIAMS) - Tanya has an excellent singing voice with which she interpreted her musical numbers very well. Her diction and intonation was spot-on. I like the way that she always manages to immerse herself into any role she plays, and this was no exception. She was the feisty, union rep who was fighting for seven and a half cents but at the same time falling in love with the factory superintendent causing an enormous conflict of interests. This was a well crafted role with the two having an impact together on stage and was as good a pairing as you are likely to see - Congratulations.

Maggie Preston - (MABEL) - This role was excellently performed by Maggie bringing all her vast experience to the role with some fine acting and singing which really came to the fore in the duet with 'Hines', 'I'll Never Be Jealous Again' - Well done.

Tony Slevin - (VERNON HINES) - A work study man with a heart!! Tony displayed an excellent sense of comedy timing coupled with a singing voice which fitted the character exactly. His business with the knife throwing was well executed, looking very authentic from the front and the business with the trousers up, down and wrong way round was hilarious. This character was certainly in safe hands

and this role was one of the better ones I have seen Tony perform - Congratulations.

Adam Butler - (PREZ) - The Union Official with an eye for the ladies! Adam got the character just right. Here we had good movement, excellent diction so that every word could be heard, and a superb singing voice which came to the fore in the numbers 'Her Is' and 'Seven And a Half Cents' in which he brought out all the necessary humour with some super facial expressions - Well done.

Samantha Fields - (MAE) - As the vociferous voice of the grievance committee, Samantha was excellent, she certainly got inside the part and made it her own with good diction and projection and excellent facial expressions which came to the fore when she falls for Prez's advances - Well done.

Anna Jennings - (BRENDA) - This minor role as a member of the Grievance Committee was well presented by Anna, being supportive of the other members around her.

Abi Holland - (POOPSIE) - I have nothing but admiration for this young lady who stepped into this role at the last minute and learnt the words, music and choreography in a very short space of time and gave as good a 'Poopsie' as you are likely to see - Congratulations.

Rod Whyte - (MAX) - This cameo role was well played by Rod. As the salesman for the Sleep-Tite factory he discovers the sabotage to the pajama bottoms, and his demonstration with the help of Hines was excellent comedy.

John Burch - (POP) - This was another cameo role which John grasped with both hands. His feelings towards 'Sid Sorokin', who he obviously liked, and his frustration with his daughter was well displayed - Well done.

Adrian Tang - (JOE)

Dan Powell - (CHARLIE)

David Saunders - (FIRST HELPER)

Kevin Goodfellow - (SECOND HELPER) - These minor roles were well portrayed. They all had developed their own individual characters and maintained them throughout with good diction and movement - Well done.

Workers in the Sleep-Tite Pajama Factory - This chorus was excellent, they were tuneful, sang with precision and with a good balance of voices. The opening number was well sung ensuring that the show got off to a good start and which continued throughout the performance. Movement about the stage area was well controlled and the choreographic routines were well danced . - Well done.

Jill Morgan - (PRODUCER AND CHOREOGRAPHER) - The show had been well cast, I don't think there was a weak link. Movement and stage positioning was good with smooth entrances and exits and some excellent pictures being achieved. Characterisations had been well brought out and the choreographic routines had been well devised and added much to the overall excellence of the show.

John Lawes - (MUSICAL DIRECTOR) - John had gathered together a fine group of musicians who played the music sympathetically and not overshadowing the performers achieving a good balance between the two. The cast appeared to know the music with good entries and well balanced voices with the principals also giving a good account of themselves.

Stage Manager & Crew – A well managed stage with swift, silent scene changes and no visible hitches.

Lighting Design & Operation - A lighting design which ensured the right atmosphere was generated in the various scenes and on the night of my visit the cues were well picked up.

Sound - The sound balance throughout was good. The lack of 'radio mike's' ensured that the human voice could be heard as intended and not distorted by the use of this type of amplification.

Costumes - by The Haslemere Wardrobe - The costumes were good, they were colourful and in keeping with the period displayed. They appeared to fit well, looked clean and well pressed.

Scenery & Properties - By Scenic and Property Hire - Generally the scenery was adequate giving a good indication of the various scenes. I did feel however, that the office scenery appeared worn and drab and certainly in need of refurbishment. The knife board was most effective and well controlled. Properties - These had been well researched and looked authentic on stage, particularly in the 'Sleep-Tite' factory scene. The use of small handheld torches in the 'Hernando's Hideaway' scene brought a mysterious feeling to the scene.

Make-up - This aspect had been well applied so that it looked authentic on stage. The correct bases and highlights had been used and character makeup had been well devised.

Programme - This was an excellent programme, it was eye-catching and colourful, with good graphics. It contained all the necessary information and items of interest, all easily readable in subdued light. Photographs were pin sharp and I recommend that it is submitted for consideration of a NODA Programme Award - Congratulations to those responsible.

Front of House - Once again, Reading rose to the occasion with smart and easily identifiable Front of House staff who were friendly and welcoming to their audience - Keep up the good work.

Thank you for inviting me to review your latest production, and for your excellent hospitality. I thought it was a most enjoyable show and I wish you all success with your next production 'Iolanthe' in a new venue.

Henry Hawes - NODA Representative - Area 13