

STAINES MUSICAL THEATRE GROUP

‘BETTY BLUE EYES’ – MARCH 2019

‘Betty Blue Eyes’ opened at the Novello Theatre in London in April 2011 and closed after just six months in September of the same year. It was delight to see something so new and so entertaining.

The High Street shops trucks created the feel of the time and were moved around easily by the stage crew when necessary. It was quite clear that we were in the three ladies’ houses (when Gilbert visits) despite the absence of anything to signify the fact, and the generally simple approach to setting the scene worked well. The properties were given thought so as to be suitable for the period as were all of the costumes.

A big bright company number at the opening set the scene for what turned out to be a really different and well-rehearsed production. There was plenty of action for the chorus and they backed the principals unstintingly.

Dan was very good as Gilbert Chivers, ruled by his ambitious wife, and a heartthrob for the ladies who had experienced his ‘magic fingers’. He gave a relaxed and convincing performance.

As his wife Joyce, Emma Hounsell was first class – strong and ambitious for their future together and her timing was spot on.

I barely recognised Sue Tregoning as Mother Dear. She too played her part most credibly. Adopting the posture of an old woman she brought out the humour of the role brilliantly.

The trio of three men who were hoping to gain from rearing Betty were played strongly by Wesley Wooden (Dr. James Swaby) William Hann (Henry Allardyce) and Jordan Bateson (Frances Lockwood). They each portrayed their different characters quite clearly. Lockwood was fairly tough and looking to the business side of matters, Dr Swaby was arrogant and also thinking of his own gain – perhaps a little aggressive for a doctor – and Allardyce was just a big softie who wanted to save Betty, and it turned out, fell in love with her blue eyes! The men were a perfect foil for each other. The scary Mr Wormold the Official Meat Inspector, who would confiscate at the drop of a hat, was impressively played by Robert Franck and back in the 1940’s a man such as he was must have struck dread into the hearts of those trying to feed themselves and their families.

John Carter played the butcher Metcalf with ease and Faith Powell was nicely suggestive as his wife.

As Mrs Allardyce, Sharon Young made the most of the comedy as woman who has had to give up her bed for a pig, and her short vocal section in ‘Confessions’ was well done.

The number with the dancers, ‘Nobody’, was especially good and Joyce’s change of costume behind the fans was perfectly executed. I also loved the scene in the Dance Hall when Joyce meets her husband.

Mark Burford did a splendid job with Betty and just like in ‘The War Horse’, after the first few minutes the puppeteer became invisible. Betty’s movements were unbelievably realistic.

On the technical front the toy car going to collect Betty and coming back with her inside was a lovely touch as was the life size car bonnet with headlamps etc. Another notable scene was the one with the men behind the stalls in the gentlemen's loo – very funny!

There were some interesting touches with the TV programmes and the appearance of Elizabeth and Philip, although Alex Stephens' hair was too modern a style for the 1940's.

Unfortunately a little more attention was needed with the setting of the tables as the tablecloths were all askew. A small detail but worth pointing out as there was time to set them properly.

The voices of Christina, Glenys and Lucy, blended beautifully in their harmonic singing as the night club singers and also as Mrs Lester, Mrs Roach and Mrs Turnbull,

It was quite clear that the company were enjoying taking part in this unusual musical and all of them, the many named smaller role and the chorus, worked together to make it a success under the firm direction of Annelly James, whose choreography was visually attractive and well-rehearsed.

John Whelan did an excellent job as musical director and the eight piece orchestra was balanced. Not once did they overpower the singing.

The production was a real company show – in some ways a show of two quite separate halves and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Your programme is set out so that it's easy to find information and the cover is eye catching.

Thank you for your hospitality on the evening and for inviting me to see 'Betty Blue Eyes'.

E. Gloria Smith – NODA South East Regional Representative, District 12.