

Director & Choreographer - David Street
Musical Director – Ben Summers

Performed at The Queens Theatre, Hornchurch on Thursday 2 February 2017 at 7.30pm

As we arrived I noted that the audience had not been admitted to the theatre and, at 7.30 when the show was scheduled to start, we were told that there was a technical hitch. There was, of course, much speculation on what this might be and when the house finally opened and we were all settled in our seats, the chairman Kerry Cooke came on stage to explain that there was a problem with the projector which they had not been able to resolve. Now, given that this show is about the movies and the transition from silent to talking pictures, the films are an integral part of the show. I could only imagine the anguish back stage and the well taken decision to carry on even though there was a strong possibility that the films may not be shown.

In truth, the company handled this problem extremely well. With Kerry as Dora Bailey, reading a very picturesque description of what we should have seen when it was time to watch the first clip of film. Subsequently members of the cast came forward and re-enacted what should have happened on the film and it was great to see that the audience got it!

Congratulations to the entire company for carrying on as though nothing had happened, their confidence in what they were doing made it very easy for the audience to follow the plot line even without the films.

The show opens outside the theatre where the premier of the latest silent movie featuring Don Lockwood (Jamie Fudge) and Lina Lamont (Sophie Warrington) was to be shown. We are also introduced to the main characters, Cosmo Brown (Allister Smith) R F Simpson (David Cormack) Roscoe Dexter (Dean Mobley) Zelda Zanders (Jess Pether) and Dora Bailey (Kerry Cooke).

Jamie's performance as Don was stylish; although he didn't seem too comfortable with some of his songs and dances, he delivered a well-defined character. Sophie's Lina was exactly what I expected to see and hear, a beautiful girl with a terrible voice, something that was all too prevalent in this transition period of the Hollywood movies. She pitched the voice just right and maintained it consistently throughout the show. Allister's performance as Cosmo (so different from the last character I saw him play) shows just what a versatile actor he is. He was relaxed in the part and obviously enjoying every minute of it. Kathy Selden was well played by Rachel Watson, she looked good, has a lovely voice and can dance, perfect casting.

The other Principals produced good characterisations although I felt that Dean's Roscoe was a bit over the top. The audience thought he was a hoot and he was very entertaining, but I would think that such overt 'campness' would not have fitted well, even in Hollywood, in the twenties. The ensemble worked well, this company usually produce good harmonies and strong singing and this was the case for this show too. The dancers did well, although they didn't seem as coherent a troupe as one would expect from drilled Hollywood babes! There were some lovely characterisations from the members of the chorus, playing the smaller parts.

The costumes did the job but I have seen better ones in the past. I do think it was a shame that Zelda seemed to wear the same costume throughout the show (over several weeks!), that would, absolutely, NOT have happened in Hollywood!

So back to the problem with the films. I was so pleased to see that they had managed to get them working for the second half of the show, at least the audience had the chance to see what was supposed to happen.

The scenery was OK, if a little tired and the rain truck worked well. However, I was, really, disappointed with the lighting. From what I could see, there seemed to be just one main lighting state which consisted of four red lamps. And, at one point, in *You Were Meant For Me*, Don says that he is bringing in more lighting and nothing happened after the first state came on. Neither was there the mist that was declared in the dialogue, although there was a very realistic fog machine on stage, clearly not a working model! Such a pity as the right lighting can add so much to the atmosphere of the piece. I see, from the programme, that the lighting was credited to the theatre, which is a real disappointment as one would think that a professional theatre could produce a better lighting plot than the one we saw.

Overall though, despite the difficulties caused by the projector, this was a very enjoyable show and the audience certainly appreciated it. Well done for carrying off such a difficult situation with style and grace.

Tessa Davies