

Shenfield Operatic Society All Shook Up

Artistic Director & Choreographer – David Street
Musical Director - Ben Summers

Performed at The Queens Theatre, Hornchurch on Thursday 31 January 2019 at 7.30pm

Firstly, I must say that I do not remember there being so many chorus numbers in this show, but Artistic Director David Street took advantage of the excellent ensemble to turn more of the songs into 'big' numbers, and very successful it was too. This is a strong company with many excellent performers in the cast, fully justifying David's decision.

This is, basically a 'juke box' show to showcase the songs of Elvis Presley. As such it is a bit disjointed, with songs and dialogue mixed together. Just as the cast member got started on a song, some dialogue interrupted it and vice versa. This must have made directing and performing quite difficult and it did affect the 'flow' of the show. However, this is a comment on the writing, David and the cast made the very best of it.

Allister Smith played the lead role of Chad; he is an excellent actor and the characterisation was very good. I was a bit worried about his singing as his voice didn't really match my expectations for Presley songs. For me, there was not enough depth to it. However, Allister worked really hard at the character which came across well. He certainly had the hip swivelling off to a 'T'!

Joanna Hunt played the female lead Natalie very well, making the most of the comedy inherent in the storyline. Kate Smith was excellent as Sylvia and her rendition of There's Always Me was sublime. Liberty Watts was also excellent as Lorraine and Robert Phillips produced a warm and loveable character as Jim Haller. Jamie Fudge obviously enjoyed playing Dennis, a great character with lots of scope for comedy which Jamie did make the most of. Louise Byrne was Miss Sandra, a typical 'Southern Belle' and beautifully portrayed. Greg Morgan was very good as Dean Hyde and his voice blended well with Liberty's in their duet It's Now or Never. Kerry Cooke played Mayor Matilda Hyde, Bill Jaycock played Sheriff Earl and Adam Poplewell played the Warden.

So, a very strong cast of Principals and a very strong ensemble with some very talented dancers, although a few more smiles from the dancers would have been nice. I do have a few comments to make about the technical side of the show. The storyline implies that the first half of the show is dowdy and downtrodden, and the lighting did show this. However, I thought that many of the costumes in the first half were a bit too bright and, in some cases, a bit too risqué for the way the town is portrayed. There was a black spot downstage left and, I understand, this was because a lamp blew just as the show was starting. Nothing anyone could have done about that, but it does suggest that the Principals may need to be a bit more aware of the lighting and, if they find themselves in a black spot, to think about how this looks to the audience.

The scenery was good, supplied by a professional scenery supplier, and the spaces were well used by the cast through the show.

I enjoyed the production, well done to all for a good evening's entertainment.

Tessa Davies

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