

2017 9-5 the Musical

Director: Kathy West

Musical Director: Vicky Pascoe

Choreographer: Jess Madeley

Costumes: Triple C's Costumes Theatrical Hire

Scenery: Andy Martin Production Support

The 1980 comedy film *9 to 5* was originally the idea of Jane Fonda who is recorded as saying to her writer, ... "what you have to do is write a screenplay, which shows you can run an office without a boss, but you can't run an office without the secretaries." Its success prompted Dolly Parton to write a tongue-in-cheek musical version that had its premiere in 2008. Although short-lived on Broadway the show, with its fantasy storyline, has gone on to become popular the world over and, offering as it does leading character roles for no fewer than four women, a favourite for amateur companies who so often have more women than men to accommodate.

The improbable plot and comic caricatures offer the actors a chance to play over-the-top in an almost pantomime way and the audience is asked to suspend disbelief for the duration whilst absorbing an underlying commentary on a society that has, thankfully, moved on just a little since the '70s. St. Austell AOS have taken this story and presented an imaginative, dynamic and entertaining evening that the audience loved - certainly on the night I saw it the standing ovation would testify to that. It becomes a challenge then to write anything other than a list of superlatives to back up the cast's acceptance of that accolade from an enthusiastic full house!

The set, designed by local Andy Martin Production Services, offered nothing of reality but easily allowed the creation of the many backdrops this show requires with its swift changes from one scene to another. At the turn of a screen, by the cast themselves, or a smooth fly in, it became various office settings, homes, hospital and dream scenes. I wondered how on earth you rehearse all that before the set arrives! The lighting, similarly designed, was harmonious and equally pleasing. Sound effects came on cue and were appropriate.

The costumes showed an originality, with the cast all dressed differently - like real people; so unlike the more traditional musicals with chorus members in matching or co-ordinating outfits. The era was appropriately conveyed and a variety of character styles was obvious. The many quick changes must have kept the backstage dressers busy and, as far as I could tell, went without a hitch. The makeup and wigs were not always convincing, however. Those of the "Three Degrees"-type backing singers lacked an attention to detail, unmatched and rather untidy - but given the comedy element of their appearance perhaps that wasn't important. I did wonder if Doralee was quite extreme enough in her supposed looking different from other women. The words of her *Backwards Barbie* tell of too much make up, too much hair and false eyelashes. She looked a little too normal - even down to her visible underwear lines!

The choreography was kept simple enough to be achievable by the large company yet delivered a lively picture for ensemble numbers, and much movement from the world of physical theatre, that wasn't strictly dance, added to the energetic presentation throughout. Violet's lift was a little clumsy the night I saw it - a challenging move that requires practice and co-ordination. The MD's 11-piece orchestra was tuneful and supportive - only once or twice did I feel they were a little too loud drowning out words I couldn't hear. This was sometimes down to the diction of the cast, though, who have to enunciate clearly when delivering lines unfamiliar to the audience. We can all imagine the words for *Oh What a Beautiful Morning* even if they're not clear! Maintaining an accent while singing is not easy

and this is apparent in solos particularly when the performer falls back to his default of knowing he has a good voice.

The overall impression of this show comes via the lifting of the script from page to stage by this director who has the imagination and skills to communicate her vision to the company. We hardly had time to catch our breath as the pace never faltered in its rush from scene to scene of this madcap fairytale. The decision to encourage the leads to play exaggerated characters worked as they took that on enthusiastically and for the most part the ensemble supported them with equal energy but I was aware of just a few of the faces lacking a genuine involvement. Of course, we're not professionals but can we not hope that a little development towards their spark in the eye and physical drive might take place in those 'chorus' members who take part in amateur musicals year after year?

The opening number was a lively montage of individual moments, colourful, interesting and original, and attracted us in to learn more about the characters. Subsequently we enjoyed a variety of company numbers, trios, duets and solos, including the dream sequence reminiscent of *The Witches Of Eastwick*. This is a large company to manoeuvre around the stage – the space was well used with no collisions, and the blocking showed no overuse of any one area. Using the cast to move the set and furniture is so much slicker than tab drops and blackouts and this cast was well rehearsed and responded promptly to the demands. The three leading ladies were ideally cast, each having a strong singing voice and confident stage presence. And I did enjoy the smaller role of Roz. The men, also, fitted their roles and it was lovely to see some new young men up there - hang on to them!

I liked the little touches - a convincing face slap, the car being 'driven' off by a chauffeur after the abduction, the upright bed and the funnel in a bottle for Hart's convenience! And I loved the 'peeling' with the red umbrella. This was a hugely entertaining show, new to me, and I welcomed the invitation to visit you all, for which thank you. The question is now, What next year to follow that?

Oriel Bennett

NODA South West Regional Councillor