

## **2015 Sister Act**

**Director:** Kathy West

**Musical Director:** Vicky Pascoe

**Choreographer:** Maureen Pascoe

**Costumes:** Dress Circle Costumiers

**Scenery:** Andy Martin Production Support

**Venue:** The Keay, St Austell

“Sister Act” is such a well written show that almost anyone could succeed with their presentation. The songs are fun, the jokes funny and the concept audience friendly. Everything is handed on a plate to a company and it is for the team to add that extra special X-factor to it. In that sense alone does this show become difficult, and careful planning and rehearsal is required to bring it all together.

The audience, on the last night, was certainly “up-for-it” and every patron was expectant of a highly entertaining and enjoyable evening. While being kept waiting for the start while last minute patrons were failed over, the auditorium was filled with expectant chatter.

As I commented on Saturday night, the first four scenes are the most problematic. This is partly due to the writing and partly due to the absolute necessity to get the story clearly understood by the audience. In the hands of an experienced drama Director the dialogue was clearly delivered, character’s well defined, and the pace quickly established. Andy Martin’s set design certainly aided the pace at the beginning and we were very quickly at the convent and beginning to be entertained by the nuns.

The set for the cathedral/convent was well thought through creating the appropriate atmosphere and aiding quick changes to different situations. The moving pulpit was inspired - gaining the most joyous laughter while emphasizing the Monsignors dialogue - so vital to the telling of the story. Eddie’s apartment was kept simple and immediately created the right setting. Andy Martin Production Support’s set design, planned operation of the set and the lighting design are a valuable part of the success of shows at St Austell and they are enhanced by creative understanding from the Director and good support from the stage crew.

Costumes were most appropriate. It is not easy to be inventive with this show, but it could be easy to be inappropriate. The costumes were well chosen and the period of the piece enhanced by some highly entertaining outfits for the men. The company were well served by the costumiers and, as usual, everything had been sorted to a high standard by the hard working wardrobe team.

Make-up was just right, along with the wigs which gave that lovely late Seventies feel without too much of the Whoopi Goldberg look. It is so good when the features of the actor are taken into consideration when designing make-up and wigs. It can go so horribly wrong. When it came to Curtis & his henchmen the look was so recognizable with each of them being so reminiscent of someone famous. I had no idea you boys looked so like ..... I shall not fall into that trap.

As expected the props were well presented, with a nod to the period of the piece and to the audience’s expectations. As usual everything was handled with competence.

One of the abiding successes of shows at St. Austell is the quality of the sound enhancement when the dialogue is so clear that one feels that the actor is speaking directly to one, there can be no lost opportunities. This ensures that the story is clearly grasped and the jokes fully enjoyed. Particularly pleasing in this presentation was the balance of the harmonies (especially in the opening number) — not just against the band but with each singer. The well presented dialogue could be heard (teamwork between Director, Actors & Sound Designer). My only criticism would be the immediate fading in of auditorium music at the interval. This could have awaited the audience’s inevitable buzz of conversation and the house lights which have to be delayed due to the backstage limitations.

Choreography was up to its usual high standard using all the cliqued Seventies moves and more. The routines were appropriate to the talents of the performers. They were well drilled and pleasantly exhausting to watch. The many varied nuns got it together and gave very competent performances. There were some nice extra touches making good use of individual member’s talents. The boys had been well drilled, too, and they did pretty well to maintain their routines. Eddie’s & Deloris Fantasy Dancers were well conceived and presented. As required by the show, all the movement was high energy, sparkling and great fun.

The music was in extremely capable hands. The band played beautifully with a good understanding of the style of the piece and an appropriately supportive nature. In fact, at times, it was so good one hardly noticed it. There was some good use of colour and the orchestration was well served. Harmonies were pretty good throughout. Some very hard work had gone into achieving this and parts were well maintained despite the movement. As

referred to earlier, this was aided by some very balanced and intelligent sound enhancement. Each part was audible and the balance between the melodies and the harmonies was well maintained. But the sound operator cannot assist this balance if it is not already there and the hard work in rehearsal paid off. This presentation included some of the best singing I have heard at St. Austell: all the hard work was worth it.

Direction was in firm hands displaying a good understanding of the plot, the dialogue and the intention of the show. Every role was well cast utilizing the individual members' talents to the full. There was some depth in the characters where possible, scene changes were smoothly integrated into the plot, diction was good and gags well set up (even the ones the audience didn't get). There was a good pace which was maintained without ever feeling rushed. Relationships were clear and where possible there was some emotive interpretation. Congratulations on the clever solution to the visit of the Pope and the extremely frenetic chase which unlike many other performances flowed and made sense.

The Ensemble worked well together ensuring that every scene was worked well. The bar scene had plenty of entertainment in the detail, the ho-bos contrasted well with their poor state and the fantasy dancing, the altar boys and policemen all contributed without apology and kept the standard high.

As the newspaper report of the nuns says:(sort of) I laughed, I cried, I sang along etc., etc., all of equal measure. This is known as the feel good show and this was successfully achieved, maintaining the standard recent shows have set. It needs to be remembered that audience enthusiasm should not detract from the concentration required by actors and crew to ensure a slick presentation. It is difficult not to get over enthusiastic when the reaction is so good, but a measure of detachment must be maintained to ensure all goes smoothly.

Another storming success by the Society. I look forward with keen anticipation to next year's Downton Abbey with songs.

*Nick Lawrence*  
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