

BROS Theatre Company

DAMES AT SEA • OCTOBER 1998 • PARKSHOT

REVIEW • MIDDLESEX CHRONICLE

One of the mainstays of the Hollywood musical, especially during the 1930s, was the 'backstage' plot, with the troupers, whether they were struggling professionals or a group of youngsters trying to break into the big-time, overcoming all odds and obstacles to get their show on the stage.

'Dames at Sea', which was given in the Studio Theatre of Richmond Adult College last week by Barnes & Richmond Operatic Society (BROS), is an affectionate send-up of all those movies and is highly successful because it does not attempt to poke fun at the genre, but in a way, to celebrate it.

BROS's presentation of the show was sheer joy, from beginning to end, not least because the whole cast played the piece absolutely straight, allowing the audience to see the funny side of the whole procedure and to enjoy the accuracy and good-naturedness of the parody, for which much praise must go to director Andy Locke.

An equal amount of recognition must be afforded co-director and choreographer Melanie Edwards for drilling the cast in the routines.

And that cast was terrific, from the innocent Ruby come to search for fame on Broadway, given a shining sweetness by Debbie McDowell and Tara O'Sullivan warmhearted as her newly found best friend Joan to Angela Sturgeon's monstrous leading lady Mona who had every facet of the character off to a 't'.

Then there were the men: Carl Smith was the ambitious songwriter constrained only by the fact that he is in the Navy, and who brought an attractive personality and a pleasant singing voice as well as a thousand-volt smile and a matching innocence to that of Ruby. His sidekick, Lucky, allowed Hamilton Faber every opportunity to clown, yet he never overdid the slow-wittedness, while Robert Salter was a splendid Captain of the battleship that is pressed into service as a theatre when the show's original venue is demolished - and what a marvellous coup de theatre brought the first half to an end with one of those enormous building-shatter balls swinging out over the audience!

The chorus girls and boys performed with a will, and the pit band directed by Carole Baker had a whale of a time, although balance might have been better served if they had been placed nearer to the audience.

I laughed much, and more often hugged myself with delight at this delightful tribute to the Hollywood musical and BROS did it proud.

This is the full review which was heavily cut when published originally.

**George Allan
Middlesex Chronicle**

REVIEW • RICHMOND & TWICKENHAM TIMES

ALL-SINGING ALL-DANCING ENTERTAINMENT

The first night was packed and apparently there were queues of people waiting for returned tickets for each performance of Barnes and Richmond Operatic Society's latest production.

Dames At Sea was being put on in the Studio Theatre at Parkshot in Richmond. It was described as a spoof on the wonderful movies made by Ruby Keeler and Dick Powell in those long-ago black and white days of showbiz schmaltz.

The music for the show was supplied by two pianos and some percussion and this was produced with panache and joy by Carole Baker, Michael Morwood and Robin Goddard.

The story doesn't bear too much scrutiny. Suffice to say that a theatrical company is trying put on a show - we see them in rehearsal and agonising over who is to get what role and falling in love and worrying about the demolition of the theatre they're about to open in and encouraging a raw newcomer... well, all pretty much as one remembers.

The whole thing was put over with such gusto and enthusiasm one could quite see why people would be clamouring to see it - but how did they know what fun it would be in advance of the first performance?

There was so much to admire - the casting looked simply tip top. Angela Sturgeon as Mona, glamorous with her red hair but just the teeniest bit past it; Tara O'Sullivan as the trouper Joan, talented and glam; Debbie McDowell as the ingenue Ruby and Carl Smith as songwriter Dick. Various chaps played attractive young sailors - including Hamilton Faber as Lucky.

The dance routines were great fun and the costumes terrific - I specially liked the girls' rehearsal garb - fresh little tops finishing just under the bust worn with flared striped shorts. A speciality number set in Singapore was a lovely excuse for 'cloth of gold' robes and truly amazingly dazzling head-dresses.

A song in the rain prompted oh-so-pretty plastic see-through brollies and the gorgeous kitsch finale with no less than three weddings produced some stunning white satin numbers.

In short, Dames at Sea looked terrific - truly an all-singing, all-dancing joyous entertainment.

Helen Taylor
Richmond & Twickenham Times
