



CARLTON
OPERATIC
SOCIETY

TOP HAT – REVIEWS

NODA

Company:	Carlton Operatic Society
Production:	Top Hat
Director:	Ross Lowe
Musical Director:	Chris Rees
Choreographer:	Rachael Rees
Venue:	Theatre Royal Nottingham
Date:	29 th May 2018

Top Hat, by Irving Berlin, is one of the classic musical film/stage shows that is made for the big stage experience, with all the dance (Tap), voice projection and production challenges that brings. At the Theatre Royal this week, Carlton Operatic produced a show that was very much equal to those challenges.

Chris Rees has the reputation amongst many of the musicians I know as being one of, and for most the best MD around and this was evident in every aspect of the production. His leadership from the Pit brought the energy and precision to guide the dance numbers (which had been expertly choreographed by Rachael Rees) and provide a perfect soundscape to emphasise the light and shade in all the musical numbers. His obvious work in the rehearsal period with the principals and ensemble alike was rewarded with some great vocal performances and a great balance of sound from stage and orchestra throughout.

The show very much demonstrated Rachael Rees choreographic skill and commitment as she and her talented cast has managed to deliver a Tap led show in 5 months where a significant number of the cast had limited, if any, previous Tap experience. The enthusiasm and enjoyment were very evident in the faces of the cast and the warmth of the response from the audience.

Ross Lowe directed the evening with great aplomb with a very faithful rendering of the original Top Hat production, emphasising the humour and keeping the action moving at all times.

The on-stage team of Principals and Ensemble worked very well together in the production. Jonathan Allen was a very believable Jerry Travers bringing energy, and a light touch to every scene. His developing relationships with Dale Tremont (a very assured performance by Abby Wells) was completely believable. The comedic led performances from Graham Ward and Sarah Walker-Smith were very enjoyable as was the loose limbed continental depiction of Alberto Beddini by Drew Dennis. Matt Wesson delivered a fusion of Jeeves and Widow Twankey in his portrayal of Bates that was a significant hit with the audience.

Lighting design was very effective throughout the performance as was the sound design and with the costume and stage management moving swiftly between each scene all supporting the great on-stage and orchestral performances.

Congratulations to all and I very much look forward to seeing you again next year for Mack & Mabel.

Martin Holtom

Kev Castle

The musical is based on the 1935 film of the same name, with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin. In "Top Hat" we follow Broadway superstar Jerry Travers as he arrives in London to appear in a stage show from producer Horace Hardwick. But this being a screwball comedy, things do not go according to plan and pretty soon a case of mistaken identity and romance sends things off course. Travers attempts to win the heart of society girl, Dale Tremont but she mistakes him for Hardwick – a married man – meaning that his advances horrify her as he attempts to gain her hand in marriage.

This has to be one of the most glamorous of dance musicals around, but for the actors involved one that involves a lot of hard work and practice, not least in the dance numbers. But that's no problem for Carlton Operatic; they are no strangers to hard work, as you'll already know if you've seen any of their past productions.

Taking on Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers was never going to be an easy ask for our leads but this pair took you into their own little glamorous world and for a while Jonny and Abby were Fred and Ginger.

Abby Wells (Dale Tremont) oozed glamour and Hollywood style and what a gorgeous voice. her finesse when dancing made her look like she was floating above the stage.

Jonny Allen (Jerry Travers) is a very charismatic leading man and a very capable tap dancer. You instantly warm to him and his cheesy one liners.

Graham Ward (Horace Hardwick) makes us wait until almost the last number for us to really hear what a lovely singing voice he has in his duet with Sarah in "Outside Of That I Love You", a song that shows off Berlin's great comic writing style.

Sarah Walker-Smith (Madge Hardwick) has been teased back to performing by this brilliant musical and she delivers an effortless performance of womanly wit.

Drew Dennis (Alberto Beddini) not only shows off a fine singing voice - which anyone who has seen him before would know of anyway - but also a convincing Italian accent. He also is a very good character actor and managed to get some of the ladies in the audience a bit hot under the collar with his strip tease. Well the elderly pair I sat next to got a bit fidgety at this stage of the proceedings! Seriously though, this is a gem of a part and Drew shone.

Matt Wesson (Bates). What can I say about Matt that I haven't said before. He is a brilliant character actor with a multitude of voices and accents, all highlighted in the role of Horace's man servant. He's always had an eye and ear for comedy and casting Matt in this role really plays to all of his strengths.

A big ensemble of actors and dancers fill the stage and it's always fun to not read the programme and spot the local actors from other shows, knowing that the ensemble is always going to be as strong and dependable as the main character actors.

Part of that ensemble is also one to watch vocal wise, and that is Jacob Fowler who plays the hotel singer.

There are so many fine vocal ensemble parts which also create that feeling of heavenly choirs. Think Hollywood, Broadway and the old Esther Williams vocal scores and that will give you an idea of the feel of these sections.

Rachael Rees does an amazing job in choreographing this show. The choreography plays a massive part in creating that glamorous world of the Hollywood and Broadway jet set and you really feel that you've been transported to that particular era with these dance routines. just magical, and after all this is Fred and Ginger's forte.

Directed by Ross Lowe and in his Carlton Operatic Directorial debut, Ross has brought together a team of performers that are so strong, you could easily forget that these lot do not do this full time as a profession.

Chris Rees is the Musical Director, and what an incredible score he has to work with. "Puttin' On The Ritz" "I'm Putting All My Eggs In One Basket". "Let's Face The Music And Dance", "Top Hat, White Tie And Tails", "Cheek To Cheek" are just a few of the magical songs that Chris and his wonderful 15 piece orchestra reproduce in this show.

As you'd expect the costumes were out of this world, simply oozing style and class on every one on the stage.

For a musical of this size there are a lot of people, many I know from other local theatre groups who work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep the cogs of theatre turning as smooth as this group do.

A slick stage management and scene changers - and what amazing sets and scenes there were for this show, many taking your breath away at first sight.

Great lighting, designed by Tom Mowat and the Sound Design by Rob Kettridge, Rob Temperton and the Theatre Royal.

So if you want a night out that has class, style, great talent, clever script and lyrics, as well as infuriatingly catchy tunes and incredible dance routines, you need to look no further than this show.

"Top Hat" is at the Nottingham Theatre Royal until Saturday 2 June 2018.

Theatre Online

Pre-Show

Good evening and welcome to Nottingham's Theatre Royal on this warm but pleasant evening. I am really excited to be here to see a wonderful show from the award winning Carlton Operatic Society - Top Hat. I have seen this in the West End when it starred Tom Chambers and loved it.

Tonight we are promised an exciting journey back to the golden age of Hollywood with Carlton Operatic.

The show is full of Irving Berlin's hits including Cheek to Cheek, Top Hat, White Tie & Tails, Let's Face the Music & Dance and Puttin' on the Ritz.

The story of Top Hat follows the adventures of Broadway superstar Jerry Travers as he dances through Europe to win the heart of beautiful society girl Dale Tremont.

It was originally a smash movie hit for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and brings to life the colour, glamour and glitz of 1930s Hollywood with dazzling costumes and captivating tap dances.

Last year it was Legally Blonde and before that Grease and West Side Story, which were all great productions so I am really looking forward to seeing this magical, toe-tapping extravaganza. More from me later.

Interval Report

Good performances so far from the whole cast. I am loving hearing those great tunes from Irving Berlin again. There are super costumes and well choreographed dance routines by Rachael Rees. Loving the performances of Abby Wells and Jonathan Allen who are playing the well known Astaire and Rogers parts very well and also making them their own.

Graham Ward is a splendid Horace Hardwick, very well played. The other principals are very well cast. Sarah Walker-Smith (Madge Hardwick), Drew Dennis (Alberto Beddini) and Matt Wesson (Bates).

The ensemble is excellent and Director Ross Lowe is giving them plenty of things to do.

The Orchestra conducted by Christopher Rees is enhancing the experience of this musical and dance show. The musical standard of both orchestra and performers is very high. The lighting is dynamic and the sound is crystal clear.

Looking forward to Act 2 which is about to start.

Post Show

What a good production of this entertaining musical here tonight. Carlton have once again shown what a wonderful society they are.

There was a wonderful depth of talent on stage tonight and overall this was a very good production. Great musical and dance performances from the principals and the ensemble who certainly danced their socks off.

That's it for now from the Theatre Royal. Do come and see this show if you can - you will most certainly regret it if you don't.

Good Night from Nottingham.

Full Review

In this day and age "there may be trouble ahead", but at the Theatre Royal this week "there's music and moonlight and love and romance", so lets' just "face the music and dance" ...

Once again Carlton Operatic Society has proved they are at the top of their game, by producing an excellent show.

Although Top Hat is a very old musical comedy, it has words and music by the wonderful Irving Berlin, so it is full of great well known songs including Cheek to Cheek, Top Hat, White Tie & Tails, Let's Face the Music & Dance and Puttin' on the Ritz.

Like many musicals of its time, the story is a little thin to say the least: it is about song and dance man Jerry Travers, who is in London to appear in a show, produced by his friend Horace Hardwick. He stays in Horace's suite the night before the show opens and becomes enamoured with the woman in the suite below, Dale Tremont. Due to a mix-up, Dale believes that Jerry is Horace. The only problem is that Horace is married to her friend Madge and Dale decides to teach him a lesson. After much singing and dancing, they eventually sort it all out, much to the delight of everyone.

It was of course, originally a smash movie hit for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, and brings to life the colour, glamour and glitz of 1930s, with dazzling costumes and captivating tap dances. This has been transferred to the stage in this production, which was a box office success in the West End, starring Tom Chambers.

In this production there are excellent performances from the principals and the large ensemble cast.

Playing the part of Dale Tremont is the incredibly talented Abby Wells. From the moment she first appeared on stage it was obvious that her performance was going to be of a professional standard. She has a lovely powerful voice, is a fine actor and dances with flair and considerable expertise. She brings suitable glamour to the role, coupled with a lively delivery that brings the character to life.

She works well with the highly accomplished Jonathan Allen who played the part of Jerry Travers. It is not easy to compete with the original Jerry - Fred Astaire - but he has no difficulty stamping his own considerable talent on the role. The part is demanding: lots of singing, dancing and dialogue and Jonathan makes it all look easy.

Graham Ward is a splendid Horace Hardwick. He is a very competent comedy actor who has a wonderful singing voice and he brings a bumbling charm to the role. Pity that the part does not involve him in much singing until the Finale!

Sarah Walker-Smith (Madge Hardwick) is excellent as a singer and a very funny comic actor. She had some wonderful one liners and her delivery is perfect; Madge is a self assured grand dame with an unashamed eye to the main chance and Sarah plays her with a knowing and engaging twinkle.

Drew Dennis is the extravagant and colourful Italian dress designer, Alberto, and is to be congratulated both for his accent and delivery and the excellent, very amusing performance of "Latins Know How".

Well known actor and singer, Matt Wesson is delightful in the role of the butler, Bates. He makes the most of the part, showing how versatile he is, having to play several different characters and deliver some beautifully accented and amusing asides.

There are super costumes and well-choreographed dance routines by Rachael Rees. An enormous amount of work must have gone into not just creating the dances, but teaching them to the cast and getting them perfected. There are so many dance styles in the show and most of the cast are involved; I particularly liked the Piccolino routine. There was a lot of very precise tap dancing and the "tappers" certainly showed how good they were, along with Jonathan Allen in the final number of Act 1, the iconic, "Top Hat, White Tie and Tails."

The Orchestra, conducted by Christopher Rees sounded excellent throughout. The musical standard of both orchestra and performers is very high. Chris' experience and undoubted ability as a Musical Director was always apparent and as a consequence, ensemble and principal numbers were strong, tuneful and good to listen to.

The set is almost identical to the one I saw in the London Production and very evocative of the time in which the action takes place. The show itself requires a lot of fairly quick and sometimes short scenes which presents the backstage team with some considerable challenges. On the whole these were well overcome by Ian McCarthy and Dave Guy (Theatre Royal) and the Society's Stage Crew.

The lighting is appropriate and adds to the glamour and the sound is crystal clear. Really good to have the orchestra in the pit, providing a very supportive accompaniment for the cast on stage. No over dominance at all.

Carlton have once again shown what a wonderful society they are. The Director, Ross Lowe, has certainly brought to life a colourful and imaginative vision with this large cast. I particularly liked the way he used the ensemble to populate scenes in a vibrant and natural way.

There was a wonderful depth of talent on stage tonight and overall this was a very good production. There were great singing and dancing performances from the principals and the ensemble who certainly danced their socks off - sometimes "Cheek to Cheek".

Despite this show basically being "nostalgic nonsense", with dated stereotypes and some cringe inducing male/female banter, the music is glorious and the performances are terrific.

Do come and see it if you can - you will most certainly not regret it and you will definitely come out singing "Isn't this a lovely day."

Top Hat continues at the Theatre Royal until Saturday.

East Midlands Theatre Review

Phil Lowe

Irving Berlin's stylish musical comedy, Top Hat, is a courageous choice for Carlton Operatic, one of Nottingham's premiere amateur musical societies, to produce. They are challenged with the big dance numbers, many of which are tap based; the replication of well loved songs; and the ghosts of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers – supreme dancers both. The orchestration needs to be lush and sweep us back to 1935 New York, London and Venice. The sets need to ooze glamour and the costumes need to blow us away with their style and elegance. The Top Hat singing and dancing needs to be Top Hat top notch. So, Carlton Operatic, let's face the music and review!

Given the quality of last year's West Side Story this reviewer is sat with high hopes for the production. As an audience member there is a tremulous moment when a show like this starts. One hopes to heaven that what unfolds will bring a smile to the soul and enable one to relax for the next couple of hours in good musical theatre company.

'Puttin' On The Ritz' by Jerry (Johnathan Allen) and the classy Top Hat ensemble does just that – making a perfect start to this most excellent production.

Written in 1935 the verbal gags are rather cheesy but this company recognises this and don't load the verbal humour too heavily on us. The piece still remains funny through the storyline of mistaken identity battling with the hearts of two young people; a popular entertainer called Jerry (Johnathan Allen) and a society model Dale Tremont (Abby Wells). It is a classical musical theatre story of love triumphing over all through a dazzling succession of musical numbers by Irving Berlin such as 'I'm Putting All My Eggs In One Basket', 'Lovely Day/You're Easy To Dance With' 'Top Hat, White Tie and Tails', 'What Is Love?', 'Cheek To Cheek', 'Let's Face The Music And Dance'. As the leads, Allen and Wells put in super performances that make the roles their own. Allen has bags of humour, style and charm enhanced with some fine dancing and Wells develops her role from haughty miss to lovable woman confused in love. Wells' beautiful singing is one of the highlights of this production of Top Hat, as is her superb dancing.

In the broader comedy parts Graham Ward as Horace Hardwick and Sarah Walker-Smith as Madge Hardwick are the perfect bickering couple. They bring the house down with their daft antics and their skilfully done rendition of 'Outside Of That, I Love You'. Matt Wesson is fantastic as the rather camp butler Bates, a man who is constantly making accented reference to his friends and relatives glib sayings. As Italian fashion designer Alberto Beddini (Drew Dennis) Dennis is spot on with his accent and body language and makes us wonder just how far he is going to go with his comic strip tease. Like the others aforementioned it is a delight every time Dennis appears on the stage.

The show is beautifully directed and choreographed by Ross Lowe and Rachael Rees respectively, with discipline and style oozing from every part of the well drilled ensemble of over thirty members, all of whom seem to be having a blast on stage. The period costumes are simply wonderful and Christopher Rees musical direction and his live orchestra give us great musical confidence and enjoyment in this top class show. The sets are outstanding.

Overall, we thoroughly recommend Top Hat as a great old style evening's entertainment that has echoes of a Broadway production. We were singing and dancing all the way home.

Top Hat runs at Nottingham Theatre Royal 29th May – 2nd June.

Audience Comments

I'm just writing to express my thanks for last night's show. Alice and I enjoyed it tremendously! We go to the theatre a lot and we were both really impressed by the entire cast (and musicians.) A great night's entertainment. I hope the show has a great run, you deserve it! – Councillor Catharine Arnold, Sheriff of Nottingham

Thank you to @CarltonOperatic for the warm welcome to see Top Hat last night. A great show! – Councillor Liaqat Ali, Lord Mayor of Nottingham

I very much enjoyed the performance, as did the rest of the audience. I did look out for someone from the society, at the end of the evening, but couldn't see anyone, to pass on my congratulations, in person! I hope that the rest of the run goes as well for you all, and, of course, wish you the happiest of show weeks. – Robert Hamilton, Rodgers and Hammerstein Theatricals Europe

Can you please thank all those involved for a wonderful evening. We were made to feel very welcome and you could see the results of everyone's hard work. Good luck for the rest of the week. – Councillor Gary Gregory

Hi just got back from watching top hat and I wanted to send my thanks for a thoroughly enjoyable evening. My sister and I came with our mum and grandmother and all 4 of us loved it. All the cast were marvellous, however the actors playing Beddini and Bates had us in absolute hysterics. Well done to all and thank you xx – Dani Harvey

I and my 11 year old daughter absolutely loved it! Looking forward now for her turn to be on the other side and treading the boards herself with Nottingham Operatic in October/November – Sarah Anna Windibank

Great show I saw it this afternoon. Fantastic production excellent direction great orchestra.
Excellent cast great principles well done Carlton you should be really proud. Enjoy the rest of the run, looks amazing.
– Martin Tailby

Great show with lots of laughs. Music was fantastic, the cast were excellent and the singing waiter was a particular highlight 😊🤔 well done to everyone 😊 - Lara Fowler

We thoroughly enjoyed the show, another brilliant performance. Well done to you all, loved the music. My feet danced all the way through. Absolutely brilliant! Loved it x – Sally Klackton

Fantastic show tonight, loved it. Thanks! – Matthew Mcfarlane

just wanted to say what a wonderful production by the players of TOP HAT by all the players, singers, dancers and producer(s). It was a great show and deserved the huge accolade it got this afternoon. WELL DONE TO ALL – Mrs Gardner, Mapperley Plains

Get down to @RoyalNottingham this week for the Top Hat musical until Saturday 2nd June. Watched it today, most entertaining. Well done to all the cast and behind the scenes support @CarltonOperatic #TopHat – Matthew Wilson

Huge thanks to the talented cast, crew and orchestra of Carlton Operatic Society for an amazing evening's entertainment, thoroughly enjoyed Top Hat! You were all absolutely fantastic! Abby just stunning, I'm so proud of you and absolutely loved watching you Shine, Jonny you were just wonderful as always great to see you back on stage!! Sarah what a way to come back, you were absolutely amazing, Drew you had me in stitches, you were fantastic!! The whole cast did such a great job with some amazing dance routines (Rachael the choreography was superb!!) and Christopher Rees the orchestra and singing sounded brilliant! Well done everyone you did such a great job, so proud to have such talented friends! If you haven't already got your tickets to see this show get them now!! Three shows left and you won't be disappointed, you will leave singing and dancing your way out of the Theatre! On at the Theatre royal until Saturday, what are you waiting for - BOOK NOW, you can thank me later!!xXxX!! – Kate Taylor

Endorsed by me too 🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵🎵 enjoyed the show last night. – Patrick Humphreys

Thoroughly enjoyed it - I had a smile on my face all night! Well done to all - a great night out. Recommended. – Jennifer Chilton

We really enjoyed the show, which we hope proves to be financially successful. My sister Clare, who lives on a small Canadian island and doesn't get many opportunities to see live theatre, loved her big night out. She said it revived memories of going to the Theatre Royal in the 50s to see stars such Flora Robson, Margaret Lockwood and Sir Lawrence Olivier. – David Lowe