

THE ROSE BOWL AWARDS

FOR AMATEUR
DRAMA & MUSIC

Name of Society Hanham Folk Centre Players
Name of Production Annie Warbucks
Date 7th October 2006
Venue Hanham Folk Centre
Adjudicator June Rayner

Annie Warbucks is a sequel to the musical *Annie* and the book takes up the story. Warbucks is told by Commissioner Doyle that, if he wishes to adopt Annie, he must marry. With the help of his secretary, Grace, who is in love with Warbucks, he begins the search for a suitable wife. Doyle tries to see that his choice falls upon Sheila Kelly, her niece, so that they get their hands on Warbucks' money. Suffice to say that their wicked scheme fails and all ends happily.

The score is an agreeable mixture of melodic tunes, easy to sing while the lyrics advance the story or, more often, express feelings. Lyrics are simple, often folksy in language.

The period is circa 1933 and the locations are numerous and extremely varied placing a huge demand on staging.

PRESENTATION

With its demand for 14 different locations, it was essential to simplify. The decision was rightly made to create a fairly general setting where locations could be suggested by various additions in the shape of blocks, cut-outs and furniture. So far, so good.

The overall setting selected took the shape of large rostra approached by flights of steps. The rostra appeared to occupy roughly two thirds of the stage reducing the main acting area to a strip across the forestage. The additional scenery, furniture and props employed were fairly elaborate and often detailed. In order to maintain necessary and desirable continuity, changes took place during the action towards the ends of scenes.

A much smaller area of the stage ought to have been occupied by rostra. The arrangements chosen meant that most scenes took place in an area of a few feet where only minimal movement was possible. The action was, and looked, extremely cramped and the constant activity from stage management, although performed quietly and efficiently, was prolonged and distracting. Far too much was asked of this

capable team. The director and stage manager needed to find a way to simplify bearing in mind that reality is not the most important feature in a musical. The audience is quite willing to use its imagination to fill out the smallest scenic indication. For example, bunting, sound and lighting would have been quite enough for such scenes as the ferry and the party, while a cup of coffee was sufficient for the breakfast scene, the hay manger for the Tennessee shack. One rostrum with a couple of steps Up Stage would have been enough to create scenes of a different level pictorially. While Stage Management merits hearty congratulation, their job should have been made far less burdensome.

Furniture and properties were entirely authentic and had been chosen with care by a dedicated team.

LIGHTING

To light this particular setting well would have needed twice or thrice as many lamps. So much was necessary to light individual areas on and around the rostra that there was never enough general light where the main action took place. With this proviso, the team did well in their efforts to create time of day, though it was never possible to light atmospherically. There wasn't enough equipment for this. The overall wash on the forestage was inadequate too. Only the half of the face turned to St. R was fully illuminated. The team created some fairly tight areas though spillage occurred. Cueing was prompt.

SOUND & EFFECTS

Sound collection and reproduction from the performers, including the musical trio, was good. It was very well-balanced and relayed at the right level. The mikes at stage level picked up and reproduced every distracting footfall. Sounds of the boat, of fireworks and the old chevy were effective sometimes in conjunction with lighting effects. Cueing was good.

COSTUME

Men's costumes looked in period and they were smart. It was good to see Roosevelt in a bow tie and Warbucks looked prosperous. Women looked better in Act II where shape was more correctly in period. The orphans were suitably neglected in appearance and Annie looked delightful. Bridesmaid and sailor costumes added to the interest and attraction of the picture. A devoted effort was made by the department.

MAKE UP

Was generally subtle. Grace needed a softer, prettier, more romantic-looking hairstyle. Wigs were very good.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Never has a team been so overworked! A major contribution was made by this team.

PRODUCTION

While the overall tone of the show was entirely faithful to the book and style, the staging of the show was greatly hampered by considerations of space. Edging in and out of many tiny areas was as much as anyone could do. Nothing demonstrative or expressive was possible, absolutely essential to communication, for reasons of

restricted space. Nor were some of the areas with steps of different heights, easy to approach. One was in constant fear of an accident.

The main acting area was little more than a strip right across the stage. This caused most moves to be lateral where space was necessary for the diagonal moves that good blocking depends upon. Actors, servants and orphans were strung across in inexpressive lines and telling grouping was seldom possible. Nor was it possible to stage a choreographed dance number, simply a few movements on the spot. This meant that important characters fell out of the picture by being placed in the D. St. corners bereft of light.

Which leads one to wonder whether the blocks were used in rehearsal? Had they been, the director would have recognised the problems in time to re-think.

The show opened at Christmas on an upbeat note with *Annie Ain't Just Annie*, sung brightly with lots of attack. The mood darkened with the appearance of the crooked lawyer and Commissioner Doyle whose pronouncements on the adoption and necessary marriage were clearly explained. *Changes* was performed sadly and *The Other Woman*, although tuneful, got out of sync. Attractive movement was incorporated into the number, well performed, but too curtailed. An effective scene of dialogue between Warbucks and Willoughby followed before we heard some nice group singing in *That's the Kind of Woman* and a regretful *Younger Man* from Warbucks. He must be seated for Kelly's *But You Go* because his figure tends to dominate when standing. The 'ragtime' number certainly called for dancing. In sc. 8. the children played beautifully as Annie's intention to run away became apparent. They played with feeling and great discipline. Annie's finale to the act ought to have seen her placed on a rostrum. The audience left for the interval interested in the eventual outcome as the plot had clearly thickened.

Act II began with a delightful, if terribly cramped, scene in the cabin. Alvin's *Love* a lovely ballad, was performed with the utmost sincerity and lucidity, sympathetic and heart-warming in effect. From simplicity to sophistication, the scene changed to Roosevelt's office where *Somebody's Gotta Do Something* achieved a necessary sense of urgency. This was an excellent scene characterised by excellent ensemble singing in a syncopated rhythm accompanied by some well-timed dialogue. The duet between Kelly and Doyle really needed a conductor in the shape of an MD. Neither performer sang confidently. The rhythm was difficult and the tessitura of the number was a little too low for them. This number cried out for good, well-timed stage business between the jazzy passages. The dance movements that followed were welcome. *All Dolled Up* was a Charleston, of course. The marriage scene began very slowly being staged with dignity and solemnity. As it progressed the scene quickened and as the plot was uncovered and the wicked were banished, the scene changed to one of immense sentimentality with the tenderest of endings. *I Always Knew* was soft-hearted and emotional leading into a big, joyous ending with the reprise of *Annie Ain't Just Annie Anymore*.

Musical accompaniment was splendid. It was never too assertive but always supportive and invariably carefully balanced with the singers. A shade better timing with cues was possible. There is every evidence of a really integrated team in this group which speaks of considerate guidance.