

THE  
ROSE  
BOWL  
AWARDS  
FOR AMATEUR  
DRAMA & MUSIC

Guys and Dolls

Presented by BMCC

Adjudicated by Rebecca Thompson

10<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Arguably one of the most popular musicals of all time, this upbeat show, set in '50s New York is replete with show-stopping numbers, guys, girls and gaming!

Presentation

The full depth of this stage had been opened up to create a stunning impression of down town New York. The design consisted of two main levels. An upper, u-shaped level and then beneath this an ingenious construction of flats and doorways that could be opened up and utilised as entrances and exits. A

flight of moveable, steel steps enabled players to move between the two levels.

The Big Apple was clearly established through a very effective backlit cyc: specific settings - the Mission Hall and Havana - were firmly created by pulpit, wooden benches, bar area, café tables. The efficient opening of one of the lower level flats to create the more intimate scenes was also effective and the two upper level downstage acting areas were strong - particularly SL.

This was a very inventive design that cleverly set the scene for a bustling city landscape, moving efficiently through the scenes: varying levels all around the stage provided scope for imaginative blocking and the steps were an additional playing area. The challenge with using such a creative and flexible set is that it can be overused. I also felt that although the two levels were a very useful way of blocking your ensemble numbers, the distance between the two levels would have suited a tragedy rather than a comedy....

#### Lighting/FX

A disciplined, well-timed lighting plot firmly established the mood and bustle of New York. The backlit cyc, lit in a range of mellow, moody tones, was most effective. This always provided a lovely backdrop for the atmospheric game scenes - very effectively accentuated with details including roulette FX and smoke machine. Interior scenes were warm, as was the Havana episode. Spots were used at key moments - Adelaide's 'carrying off' by the boys was striking, although spots were not always fluid on the upper level. The high, downstage areas were brightly lit for certain scenes and the ethereal hue during Sit Down atmospheric.

Taped sound FX were well-timed.

### Costume

Authentic colour tone and cut for Salvation Army uniforms, accessorised with hats and very sensible shoes. These were contrasted with an appropriate range of colourful 50s 'new look' daywear for the ladies. Adelaide wore suitably striking fabrics and styles - although I felt the evening dress was a little too modern in cut. The Hot Box outfits were fun, especially the glamorous basques. Loose fitting suits were in keeping for the gamers - the inclusion of tweed and the bright colours contributed to the authenticity here. Heavier make up and glamorous hairstyles also suited the post-war glamour of this period.

### Direction

This was a very focused, energetic fast-paced production where the tone of the piece and individual characterisation had been both clearly grasped and accordingly communicated. Discipline was tight, ensemble work effective and the nuances of mood throughout the loveable 'New York Fable' effectively captured. Casting was good, characters rightly having confidence in Runyon's writing and so effectively portraying strong characterisations of this loveable bunch. Stage management and very focused playing and cueing contributed to a very strong sense of bustle and energy. However, there was also sensitivity to shaping of the more intimate moments, so that the pathos of the lead relationships was appropriately marked.

I alluded earlier to the danger of overusing this inventive set, and I do feel this was the one downfall here....there were

several occasions when there was too much movement - for example during the dice game and I've never been in love. These were strong players, effectively communicating both story and song - too much movement of both scenery and players sometimes distracted rather than enhanced the action and emotion. The distance between the two levels was also an issue...sometimes this created an unhelpful physical tension between players that, as stated earlier, would have suited a more serious production. An example are the scenes between Sarah and Sky when although the role reversal of Sky in the pulpit and Sarah down below was effectively ironic, the distance between the pair was too acute for this type of light-hearted love story.

However, I applaud both bravery and creativity here and there were moments when this very inventive set really did enhance the impact of the production.

#### Musical Direction

Again, cohesion and focus were key elements, enabling the cast to sing these swing era numbers with attack and energy. Some excellent performances of concerted numbers - Luck be a Lady and Guys and Dolls both notable examples; diction and harmonies were both to be commended here. Good attempt of the communication of emotion in some of the ballads - I'll know, contrasting beautifully with the drunken exuberance of If I were a bell. Some very notable solo performances - highlights including Nicely's wonderfully energetic rendition of Sit Down and Adelaide's sharp, humorous interpretation of her Lament. Sky's masterful effortless baritone during both ballad and belt was outstanding.

Accompaniment was disciplined and effected with pace, contributing to the sheer exuberance of the show.

### Choreography

I am sure that you had worked very closely with the director in terms of use of the stage; again there were some wonderfully creative moments here - the Hot Box numbers - which so often lag in this show - were humorously and capably executed - inventive use of both feathers and legs! Movement of the whole cast during overture and ensemble numbers was on the whole cohesive and purposeful - there was so often a lovely sense of intention about the blocking and consequent action. Again, there were times when I feel the complexity of the set distracted from the overall intent - Marry the Man Today being an example. This is a powerful, purposeful number - but the separating and backing away of the two girls detracted from their resolution here - final movement on central block was also awkward. However, the scene in Havana was outstanding - riveting, exuberant, humorous and never ending - choreographed with creativity and executed with both humour and energy. Maybe the dancers didn't quite communicate the Central American sensuality in their movements, but the overall impression was absolutely delightful. Very well done.

### Acting

#### Sky Masterson

Excellent posture and stage presence, well-sustained focus and an effortless baritone vocal delivery all contributed to a very poised, convincing portrayal of the hardened gambler. A charming rapport with Sarah ensured that these scenes were not over sentimental and you handled the transformation to Salvation Army at the end very well. A very memorable performance.

Sgt. Sarah Brown

Appropriately demure initially, conveying an underlying sweetness in your rebuff of Sky - do watch side profiles in those earlier scenes however. You really 'warmed up' in Havana - your singing delivery was stronger in your lovely rendition of If I were a Bell and you managed to portray Runyon's delineation of Sarah's self-questioning at this point.

Nathan Detroit

Lots of attack here in terms of vocality and physical play - just be careful that your reactions do not turn the character into 'village idiot' rather than the hustler that Nathan really is. Great presence though and you led the ensemble numbers with marvellous energy and reaction. Lovely comic rapport with Adelaide.

Miss Adelaide

You captured the 'doll' with conviction - well-sustained accent, excellent movement and a wonderful sense of fun and energy in both spoken and singing delivery. Great pointing of key lines - 'we had a baby..' and slick, focused performance in your Hot Box numbers. Yet the comedy did not override the underlying pathos here - the delivery of Lament was outstanding.

Nicely-Nicely

Another well-pointed performance - you caught the humour in both face and voice. Lots of captivating energy here, great rapport with Benny and your certainly caught the swing in Sit Down: very well done!

Benny Southstreet

A great side-kick to Nicely - the height difference worked very well. Excellent focus throughout.

Arvide Abernathy

A gentle and convincing portrayal of Sarah's father figure - you capture his paternal care and understanding with sensitivity. A very sincere delivery of More I cannot wish you

General Cartwright

Understudied on my visit - you stood in with both confidence and conviction, establishing the authority of the Army General.

Harry the Horse

A well-timed, reactive portrayal of the Brooklyn Hood.

Big Jule

An entertaining cameo - the vocal pitch contributed to the humour, as did your height! Well done!

Rusty Charlie

Your focus and vocal clarity contributed to the energy and precise timing of the gaming scenes.

Lt. Brannigan

Great posture and well-modulated delivery contributed to a convincing New York cop.

Joey Biltmore

Well-projected and modulated phone call.

Thank you so much for your very warm welcome and a most entertaining evening.