

THE  
ROSE  
BOWL  
AWARDS  
FOR AMATEUR  
DRAMA & MUSIC

Bristol Music Comedy Club

‘Sweet Charity’

Book by Neil Simon  
Music by Cy Coleman  
Lyrics by Dorothy Fields

Redgrave Theatre  
June 11<sup>th</sup> 2011

## OVERALL PRODUCTION

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to visit the BMCC again and as always have to include the comment that being in your 1956 Production of 'Oklahoma' at the Hippodrome was my theatrical debut as a member of the chorus and understudy of Ado Annie. Bertie Brown was also in the chorus, Jimmy Morris directed, which may be of interest!

Although the Hippodrome days have long gone, you have a wonderful record of achievements throughout the intervening years.

I love seeing the older iconic musicals and thoroughly enjoyed your Production.

A great cast brought the poignant storyline to life and injected the music, song and dance with essential sparkle and vitality. The comedy element was sustained amongst all the angst felt by Charity and her hostess friends, also an essential ingredient.

The chorus was an unstinting support having a multi roled cast, some of whom I have seen playing leads elsewhere, certainly raised the standard and it says a lot for the BMCC that fellow thespians obviously enjoyed helping out however small the role and as I have always thought, audiences warm to seeing people in the chorus, whom they may be used to seeing playing the protagonist, the chorus is just as important, it is a pity that it is not always seen this way, as many a disappointed Director, including myself, will tell you! This element gave an added frisson to the ensemble numbers.

A very strong Principal line up brought the characters to life and propelled the action forward at a fast pace. There were many highlights, the dialogue and numbers with the five main hostesses (including Charity), were very slick and polished, 'The Rhythm of Life' almost raised the roof not to mention the spectacular 'Rich Man's Frug' with all those silver wigs, I loved the human subway and dance with torches at the beginning of Act II.

The costumes and hairstyles were nostalgically 60's and made a colourful impact. The sets were the only area where I did have some reservations, when the flats are a pale cream/off white it does give rather a stark impression and cold glare for the actors background. This was relieved at times by the lighting of course, but nevertheless was harsh at times, the actual designs worked very well apart from Vidal's wardrobe!

The choreography was excellent with a variety of dance patterns and synchronised movement, a lot of time and energy had clearly been committed to perfect this.

The lively orchestra gave their all and the familiar score was much appreciated.

The warm audience response must have been rewarding, as satisfied customers left the theatre.

## **MUSICAL DIRECTION AND SINGING**

The Principals and chorus sang out with confidence, the 'brash' American style of the era was captured. The toe tapping score is so memorable, it was great to hear the eleven piece orchestra bubbling along and propelling the pace of the Show. There was sympathetic rapport with the soloists and a sensitive contrast of moods 'Something better than this' stole the show for me. The attack was so good. 'I love to cry at weddings' seemed a little off pitch on the last night, when I attended.

## **CHOREOGRAPHY**

This was outstanding and much enjoyed. The ensemble numbers were very slick and seemed effortless, quite an achievement. The hostess numbers were especially effective. 'Big Spender' and 'Something better than this' being two examples. 'Rich man's frug' was very amusing and stylised. 'Rhythm of life' was a contrasting uninhibited success. 'I'm a brass band' was a triumph, I loved the pink top hats and waistcoats. The movement and mime for the prologue gave an impressive start. 'I love to cry at weddings', with the grouping and tableaux was the icing on the cake.

There were some excellent dancers in the chorus, an asset for B.M.C.C.

## **SET DESIGN**

As aforesaid I was concerned regarding the stark background. One could argue that it reflected reality and that may have been the intention, but I felt the choice of colour needed more depth and warmth. The upstage frames/alcoves were brilliant for the prologue. The fandango ballroom was adequately 'smoochy' and seedy. The exterior scenes for the park and use of the orchestra pit for the lake captured the humour. I enjoyed the 'Rhythm of life' on different levels. The closet in Vidal's bedroom was of course transparent all round, voile curtaining would have been more convincing for some of the 'evasive' action.

## **LIGHTING AND SOUND EFFECTS**

An artistic lighting design complimented the Show with careful use of the spot and so on, (but I was very aware of the black crew's involvement, when appearing on stage with the performers it can be very distracting for an audience's suspension of disbelief). The elevator sequence was handled well with the electric signs, leading into the 'Rhythm of life' which was very atmospheric. The dry ice and sound effects of police sirens were spot on. I enjoyed the innovative idea of the hand held torches for the opening of Act II.

The prologue was imaginatively lit with the alcoves and again on Coney Island with Oscar and Charity marooned on the parachute jump.

## **COSTUMES**

The Sixties flavour was superb with some really authentic looking costumes and hairstyles, clearly the wardrobe department had worked in detail to collate a huge number of outfits. I can still visualise 'Rich man's frug', 'The Rhythm of life' and the pink sparkle for the top hats and waistcoats for 'I'm a brass band'. The hostesses were particularly detailed and 'right' for their characters. As aforesaid Oscar was rather formal and British (I know he worked in an office) but didn't feel enough experimentation had been given to his 'Americanisation', he was also a bit of a 'weirdo' and this could have been conveyed for instance by an eccentric accessory, perhaps black horn rimmed glasses or home knitted v neck pullover.

## **INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES**

### ***Charity Hope Valentine***

This is a marathon to play and congratulations are in order because this performer literally didn't put a foot wrong! The demands of the role are enormous and could not be met without extraordinary commitment and sheer hard work. One sympathised with this resilient all giving wanting to please poignant characterisation, the physicality of the role was all embracing to her intentions and emotions. Dancing skills were first class and integral to all the musical numbers. A vibrant resonant voice did full justice to her many memorable songs with a secure technique, 'Somebody loves me', Charity's soliloquy 'If my friends could see me now', 'I'm a brass band' and 'Where am I going' were rich in dynamics and colour. Appearance, energy and interaction with the hostess friends, Vidal and Oscar was generous and convincing, but I have to say that the speaking voice seemed a little artificial and assumed. The interpretation showed tension at times, because after all she was tense, but I mean in a technical sense relaxation is another skill that will develop with more experience.

### ***Oscar Lindquist***

This was an unusual characterisation in so much as he appeared so English with classic good looks and would have been acceptable for any number of straight plays!

However this is a wardrobe comment really and I soon grew accustomed to it, apart from the dangling braces in Act I.

Oscar lacks confidence in dealing with women and is basically shy. His fear of the elevator captured the comedy, the hesitant dialogue and body language making him as vulnerable as Charity. A very pleasing singing voice for 'Bravest

individual' and 'Sweet Charity' was a highlight. The sad truth of Charity's life and eventual abandonment was a genuine regret one felt, but Oscar hadn't the big heart of Charity and was in many ways a misfit himself. Charity probably had a lucky escape, their idyll in the country being another fantasy.

The interaction with Charity developed very well as his affection for her grew, whilst sustaining the subtext of his doubts. The spectacles were not worn in some scenes, these helped with the characterisation of an odd ball living with his mother and so on, which brings me back again to appearance.

### ***Vittorio Vidal***

A gem of a role for any actor. The sophisticated film star image with the wonderfully latin accent came over most convincingly with a skilled sense of comedy timing. The sympathetic interaction with Charity, yet thoughtless determination to be reconciled with Ursula as very funny indeed as he struggled to keep Charity's presence in his bedroom undetected. A very pleasant singing voice was enjoyed for 'Too many tomorrows'. Facial expressions, movement and gesture projected the latin lover with humour.

### ***Ursula March***

A poised glamorous appearance was ideal for the role and sense of comedy for her main focus being on Vidal. The contrasting moods of quarrelling and making up were carefully balanced.

### ***Herman***

Quite a complex character, disreputable and bullying on one hand but with a sentimental trait on the other 'I love to cry at weddings' being a surprise factor. Keeping the girls in order with a cynical uncompromising attitude was his through line, effectively played with able technical skills.

### ***Daddy Brubeck***

This cameo role was very entertaining and of course a highlight of the Show, 'The Rhythm of Life' being an evergreen show stopper, full justice was given to this iconic number and had the whole auditorium rocking.

### ***Nickie***

I was very impressed with this performer whom I thought had a special stage presence together with an elegant appearance, dancing ability and lovely warm mezzo singing tone. The characterisation of an experienced loser, whom had learned to live with it and knew all the hazards was an interesting contrast to Charity's naivety. The interaction with Betsy, Helene, Carmen and Charity was fun and caring. 'Baby dream your dream' with Helene sung with courage up on those blocks and 'There's gotta be something better than this' were excellent.

***Betsy***

Integrating with her hostess friends in their ambition to get out of the fandango ballroom but finding humour in their situation came through endearingly, with very competent singing and dancing ability.

***Helene***

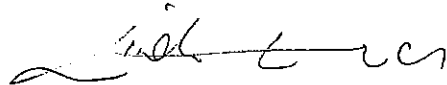
Another strong performance giving a 100% support to the 'girls' with great singing and dancing talent. An engaging characterisation convinced with the poignant sub text sustained. 'Baby dream your dream' was a triumph up on those blocks.

***Carmen***

The exotic appearance and accent held the stage with here again very able singing and dancing skills. The rapport with the other girls was touchingly supportive.

Other cameo roles were played with conviction and added to the success of the Production.

***Thank You For The Kind Hospitality  
And  
Best Wishes for Future Productions***



***Linda Evans***