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Molesey Musical Theatre - "Sweet Charity" Cecil Hepworth Playhouse - 20th June 2019

This well known period musical set in New York in the age of flower power and hippies round 1968 - 9 has become a classic because its central theme is the aching to be loved. This theme surely touches all of us!

MMT shrewdly engaged the services of James Fortune to direct and his inspirational vision was in ample evidence throughout this sparkling production. Featuring music classics such as "Big Spender", "If my friends could see me now" and "The Rhythm of Life" and much else too, the show is firmly anchored in the top division of musicals history. Musical director Elizabeth Cooper marshalled her vibrant nine players but eleven instrument band with controlled panache and her band was among the very best I have heard.

The critical choice of lead player was wisely accorded to the all round performing talents of Polly Ashton as Charity Hope Valentine. Polly played this vulnerable, heart on her sleeve character for all she was worth, and how it showed!

Playing opposite Charity was the gawky, shy Oscar Lindquist, given a brilliant characterisation by Tim O'Shea. What a dream couple of lead players! The lift scene was achingly real.

I much appreciated the excellent changes of the many scenes, where great thought had clearly been given to the continuity and therefore cumbersome and lengthy set changes were totally avoided - credit too therefore to stage manager Peter White and assistant SM Jo Smith and their crew together with the directors planning.

Lighting and follow spot, courtesy of Steve Farr was superbly used and in the fabulous show highlights of the "Rhythm of Life", the power of the drugs scene was brilliantly painted by all. A special mention to the sinuous, lean and charismatic Tyrone Haywood, who inhabited, rather than acted, the persona of Daddy Johann Sebastian Brubeck. What a star performance!

Suitably realistic costumes were provided by MMT and other local groups and wardrobe of Joan Cannell, Rita Anderson, Andrea Soundy and Valerie Abercrombie worked wonders with them.

A host of other performers gave full support with notable performances; Valerie Carr and Kavitha Parameswaran as Nickie and Helene respectively being outstanding. Other dance hall hostesses (taxi dancers) who all did well were:-

Carmen	Amanda Jayne Scott
Suzanne	Shirley Sledge
Frenchy	Heike Heath
Betsy	Charlee Clutten
Rosie	Diane Slater

All the dancers clearly relished their roles as good time girls and the sleazy atmosphere of the night time dance hall was aided by highly effective use of a ballet barre, to show off all the girls' legs and general shape to the male "customers". Appropriate stage dressing and red lighting enhanced the bleak reality of these girls' working life.

Kevin King was a most authentic Vittorio Vidal with a fine Italian accent and Diane Slater matched his

skill as Ursula March, the beautiful and jealous film star.

David Strike gave a forceful impression of Herman, the boss of Fandango Ballroom manager.

Joint Choreographers Valerie Carr (Nickie) and Amanda Jane Scott (Carmen), not only showcased their own outstanding dance talent on stage, but also ensured the other cast members, especially female ones gave noteworthy performances. The dancing was, overall, of really good standard and gave a real boost to the whole atmosphere of the show.

Director James has a real knack of enthusing his cast with his own dedication to detail and the unexpected as I have often noted in his other shows. MMT would be wise to tempt him back again and very soon!

This production had pace, vibrancy, good singing, colourful costumes, top class sound and SFX (both by courtesy of Steve Lonsdale and James Rogers), raw emotion and really touched the heartstrings.

Finally, a positive nod of approval to the well designed and attractive programme, with a heartening full mention of NODA. All in all, this was a show to remember and to treasure.

Jon Fox

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