

## **Bugsy Malone NODA Review**

**Date** 17th February 2018

**Society** Wrangler Theatre Company

**Venue** The Muse Theatre

**Type of Production** Musical

**Director** Wendy Holmes, assisted by Diane Sullivan and Paul Clark

**Musical Director** Sharon Mitchell

**Choreographer** Wendy Holmes, assisted by Diane Sullivan and Paul Clark

### **Report**

**Author: Gareth Davies**

From the moment my daughters and I arrived at The Muse this production brimmed with youthful energy and excitement! Before the show, spectators were clearly anticipating a fun afternoon and, indeed, I really enjoyed the interaction of some younger members of the audience during the performance!

The hard-working and wonderful Wendy Holmes, with great style, staged it all; the cast (average age of nine) were highly talented. The audience enjoyed the many famous songs and, of course, there was splurge aplenty! Following their pantomime 'Cinderella', in December, the Wranglers clearly had another great production on their hands.

If my own enjoyment was a *little* measured, it was for several reasons. One is that Alan Parker's concept does not have anything new to say these days about the gangster tradition, but simply reactivates its clichés by unusual casting. The other problem is that there is an unavoidable but, in this day and age, rather awkward reaction to the sight of children imitating adult mannerisms: boys strutting around with coats draped lightly over their shoulders, and the girls adopting the slinky postures of their moles. Sadly, there is something culturally uncomfortable about this in the 21st century. Thirdly, the show is too long! Particularly some of the dialogue, which could have been edited at times. In addition, I do prefer a live band – but, understandably, budgets can restrict this luxury for some companies.

This production did have many pleasures. It was a fun idea to portray the speakeasy owner Fat Sam, engaged in a turf war with the slick Dandy Dan, as one of the smallest members of the cast. The slapstick, with custard pies vainly countering goo-shooting splurge guns, is always fun! Paul Williams's numbers, effectively coached by MD Sharon Mitchell, inspired in the choreography some well-executed dance routines. Much the best was 'So You Wanna Be a Boxer' in which a reluctant pugilist finds himself drawn into a display of fleet-footed ring craft, featuring Gareth Davis in a fun cameo!

The principal roles were all played well, featuring Harry Dale as Fat Sam, with plastered-down hair and two-tone shoes, showing a natural ease on stage. Kate Roche as Fizzy, a janitor with showbiz leanings, did the old dancing-with-a-mop routine gracefully. Jess Cooper as Blousey Brown, the love interest to Bugsy, played with stylish elegance by Nieve Fay, proved she could deliver a soul number with heartfelt yearning. Hers is a great voice! Dandy Dan was confidently played by Zoe Bailey, an effective foil for Fat Sam, with the sassy Rowan Hutchins in the 'Jodie Foster' role of Tallulah. It is disappointing that there were not more boys in the male roles, but this is a perennial problem in all theatre companies. The girls did a good job as Bugsy, Dandy Dan and Fizzy.

The ensemble of gangsters, speakeasy 'goils', and many cameo appearances were all played with energy, commitment and focus. Clearly hours of rehearsal had paid off. As in the pantomime there were some scene-stealing performances from some of the youngest members of the cast – these were magical and are what live theatre is all about.

A special mention must go to the set and props of Geoff Coventry – this was all very effective and authentic – and to the costumes of Jane Down and Angie Wilson. This was a good-looking, attractive and suitably dandy production, very clearly set in 1929 NYC.

The good thing about the staged musical, in comparison with the film, is that it has a vaudevillian energy that, although I found the show to be too long, was evident in the musical numbers, comedy and slapstick.

Well done to everyone, particularly the young cast! Another enjoyable and memorable Wranglers production, thank you for your very warm hospitality, and I will look forward to 'Madagascar JR.' in July.