



Society : CYGNET PLAYERS
Production : "SWEET CHARITY"
Date : 23 February 2013
Venue : London Oratory School, Fulham
Report by : Stephen Macvicar

Report

Thank you very much for inviting me to Cygnet Player's production of "Sweet Charity" performed recently at the London Oratory School. Thanks also to Helen Burgess-Bartlett for making the necessary ticketing arrangements and to your Front of House staff for greeting me on the night.

Synopsis

ADAPTED from *Nights of Cabiria*, a film by Federico Fellini, *Sweet Charity* tells the story of an optimistic young woman, Charity, who not only wears her heart on her sleeve, she's had it tattooed to her arm! As the play begins, Charity finds herself dumped by the married man on whom she had pinned all her hopes and dreams, and she vows never again to be taken advantage of by a man. But Charity is too trusting and soon finds herself involved with an Italian movie star. The actor, however, is no better than the other men Charity has dated, and once again she finds herself jilted and alone. The next night, however, as fate would have it, she finds herself trapped in an elevator with a claustrophobic tax accountant who soon sweeps Charity off her feet. Soon it becomes clear that this man is different--that he actually wants to marry her--but will he still feel the same way when he finds out that Charity works at the Fan-Dango Ballroom as a dance hall hostess?

This was a mouth-watering and much anticipated trip to view Cygnet Player's production of 'Sweet Charity' and I was not to be disappointed. There was enough stage business during the Overture to make it interesting as we were introduced to the Central Park scope complete with bench and bridge. I think the bridge needed a brake as it appeared to move around quite a bit. Many shows start off with a production number to warm everybody up but 'Sweet Charity' strangely commences with a fairly lengthy difficult dialogue scene and a rather low key song by which time Charity ends up in the river. The scene was generally better than on most occasions that I have seen it performed but for it to work the dialogue amongst the ensemble has to be much slicker and snappier.

We then moved into the Ballroom and were introduced to our colourful hostesses for the evening. Cygnets Players is essentially a musical theatre company which attracts relatively young performers, much to the envy of many other societies, however the downside to this quirk is when characters are required to be a bit older. Whilst the hostesses performed excellently and I loved the straight out front approach to 'Big Spender', these ladies are meant to have seen a bit of life, perhaps a bit like soiled goods, had their dreams ruined and ended up in the hostess game. I felt the Cygnet ladies looked rather too fresh and somewhat enthusiastic which belies their world-weariness. The exception to this was Nickie who maintained a sense of frustration throughout.

'Charity's Soliloquy' was stylish and precise and the black and white 'Rich Man's Frug' built beautifully. It commenced rather gently but by the third scene had vibrancy and I loved the deadpan faces which worked a treat. 'If My Friends Could See Me Now' was excellent. The whole scene in Vittorio's

bedroom was excellent as Charity's personality came to the fore. The whole 'fickle finger of fate' business on the bed was superb, as was Vittorio's rendition of 'Too Many Tomorrows'. I enjoyed the Charity, Helene and Nickie' number which was enhanced by additional dancing to involve all the hostesses. As the act was drawing to a close, in burst the whirlwind character of that was Oscar and he brought a fresh impetus to the proceedings. The scene in the lift was nothing short of hysterical.

Act Two brought no let up as we met Daddy Brubeck and his clientele at a modern church. 'The Rhythm of Life' was suitably trippy and up-tempo. There were lots of outrageous shirts, wigs and glasses although strangely there were no beads in sight. The second half progressed and it seemed as though Charity had finally found a man that would stay with her and enable her to settle down. From the jaws of victory Charity encountered defeat as Oscar walked into the distance. 'I'm a Brass Band' was lively and layered but there were no iconic brass band costumes. The boss of the Fandango Ballroom pops in from time to time to gee the girls up but comes into his own in the final production number. 'I Love to Cry at Weddings' had a very strong feel good factor. All in all, this was a strong Cygnet's production.

This production of 'Sweet Charity' was a true team effort which was received very well by me and an enthusiastic audience. The creative team looked to have the cast well-rehearsed. The extremely talented Stuart Burrows created a very stylish piece as Director and was assisted by Adam Walker. Matt Ramplin had the ensemble in fine voice. 'Sweet Charity' has a very brassy score but I didn't feel that the brass section was quite warmed-up enough. I particularly enjoyed Nicole Rush's quirky choreography. It is not easy to fashion a Fosse style musical but I think Nicole got the balance right. Nicole was assisted by Dance Captain Jess Bunker. All the strings were pulled impressively by Producer Alice Berrido.

Technically, it was a tough show. The set was functional if a little tacky which fitted in nicely with the slightly seedy world which we were in. The Lighting plot was very effective and moody where necessary. The sound balance was absolutely spot on. Top marks to a dedicated stage crew under the leadership of Stage Manager Fiona Elliot. I also enjoyed the nice array of colourful costumes, provided by Barbara Hill and her team, which really added to the bright atmosphere.

There were strong performances amongst the principals both major and minor. I am unable to pass comment on everybody but I shall make a few comments on the main players; in programme order

Charity – Sabi Perez – I have seen Sabi on stage several times and was always impressed but this performance was on a different level. Sabi found the essence of Charity, a wonderful character – a blend of comedy and heart. Charity is a big role and Sabi was excellent.

Oscar – Justin Jeffreys – Justin was equally excellent. Quite often Oscar is portrayed as a bland, ineffectual human being but Justin brought the character to life bringing dimension to the role. The scene in the lift with Charity was belly-aching funny.

Helene – Steph Ramplin – Steph formed a nice partnership with Katie and they worked well as a pair. Good singing and good dancing was the cornerstone to Steph's success.

Nickie – Katie Godlesh – I really enjoyed Katie's performance. Her New York accent was easily the strongest and I could feel her inner pain.

Herman – Jeff Raggett – A lovely cameo from the maestro himself in a very fetching pair of flared trousers. I love to Cry at Weddings was expertly delivered and left us all with a smile on our face.

Ursula – Tara Stapley – A small but nice role for a young actress and Tara was a vision of loveliness in the part.

Vittorio – Jaco Botha – Jaco has both the looks and the voice to carry off this role and he did so with ease and looked every inch the matinee idol.

Daddy Brubeck – Rich Gladwell – This is a one scene wonder role and Rich made the best of it just before the police bust.

Your other minor characters, including Charlie, Carmen, Doorman, Lead Frug Dancer, Manfred and Rosie added much to the overall success of the production.

I liked your souvenir programme. It contained a sufficiency of show information and was accompanied by thorough society information and many interesting articles. Cast photos, rehearsal photos and biographies are very welcome too, it helps to assess relative experience of the performers and creative team. There was also a nice NODA advert – thank you. I will forward the logo which is presently being used. I suggest you enter the NODA Programme Competition. Details are available on the NODA website – entries to be in by 31st March 2013.

Once again thank you for inviting me to the London Oratory School and best wishes for your summer play 'The Graduate'. Hopefully, I look forward to see you again soon and if I can be of any assistance at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards

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