



Society : Cygnet Players  
Production : Top Hat  
Date : Friday, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018  
Venue : London Oratory School Theatre  
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

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## Show Report

When thinking about the glamour of Hollywood's golden age, and the tap-dancing magic of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, 'Top Hat' is most definitely considered one of the greatest dance musicals of all time.

Following last September's wonderful production of '9 to 5' it was a pleasure to return and see how Cygnet Players took on this particular challenge. However, as I travelled to the show I must admit to being slightly apprehensive. Quite simply I'd enjoyed '9 to 5' so much I hoped the high standards reached then hadn't slipped at all... As it turned out, I needn't have been worried. Cygnet Players is extremely well-run and clearly maintains high expectations for every show produced. Success breeds success and everyone associated with the society, and this show in particular, should be immensely proud.

Huge congratulations must be given to Stuart Burrows (Director) who brought his extensive experience to the table and ensured 'Top Hat' was the lavish extravaganza it deserved to be. This was quite simply an exceptional show that oozed class and quality throughout. The casting had been carefully considered, the entire ensemble added both depth and style and the whole 'feeling' was one of grandeur. Attention to detail was meticulous and this was apparent in every aspect of the show.

Sam Fisher (Musical Director) and his 14-piece band were situated at the front of the auditorium which was great to see. As the evening's entertainment began, a spotlight appeared on Sam who, wearing a top hat, led the band through the overture before throwing the hat to Jerry Travers onstage. The quality of the band, and music produced, was of a very high class and never overshadowed those speaking or singing. It is always challenging to gauge the appropriate level of music but I thought it was ideal here.

Kim Findlay (Choreographer) ensured this show delivered what was expected – a truly stunning visual spectacle from a 17-strong tap dancing ensemble. The quality of dancing, precision and timing were nothing short of superb. The amount of hard work, dedication and effort were clearly visible. Energy levels were high to begin with and maintained throughout. To see such a well-rehearsed tap-dance ensemble clearly enjoying themselves was delightful. Dance routines for the principals were both lavish and numerous – the overall show choreography was faultless.

The extremely versatile, and talented, Nick Moorhouse was perfectly cast in the lead male role of Jerry Travers. 'Puttin on the Ritz' was Jerry's first opportunity to demonstrate his superb singing and dancing skills which he achieved in style. 'I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket' was fabulous but it was 'Cheek To Cheek' that I definitely enjoyed the most. The sheer quality of dancing, whilst singing,

was exceptional and appeared almost effortless. Nothing could be further from the truth however. This was a simple case of sheer hard work, outstanding talent and a hugely impressive performance deserving of special recognition.

Charlotte Donald certainly 'did Ginger proud' and was sensational in the lead female role of Dale Tremont. Charlotte not only looked the glamorous American model but also danced beautifully and wowed the audience with a lovely singing voice. Again, the ability to sing and dance so precisely was a pleasure to see. How she managed such intricate dance moves, and high-kicking steps, in those chic, swirling evening gowns was exceptional.

Together Nick and Charlotte made a wonderful pair, one suave, the other sassy. Working extremely well together it was a delight to see all their hard work come together on stage. However, it was the iconic 'Let's Face the Music and Dance' that was their standout number. What I'd hoped for was a truly glamorous and classy performance from this pair and they surpassed expectations.

Neil Wease gave an excellent performance as Horace Hardwick, the 'uptight, stressed-out, British theatre producer' in a love/hate relationship with his wife! This was a great role and I really enjoyed the way Neil brought Horace's character 'to life', the many opportunities for humour and intricate relationships with both Jerry and Madge.

It was a pleasure to have seen Kate Chesworth on stage again – this time in the role of Madge Hardwick. I was fortunate to see Kate in '9 to 5' and it this was another fabulous role to enjoy. Wonderful acting, a fabulous love/hate relationship with her husband and again – plenty of scope for humour... Regrettably the role of Madge provided only limited opportunity for Kate to demonstrate her wonderful singing voice. 'The Piccolino' was a lovely number but it was 'Outside Of That I Love You' which stood out for me. Neil and Kate worked extremely well together and made a great husband and wife team.

Adam Walker-Galbraith (Alberto Beddini) portrayed this flamboyant Italian designer with all the gusto and mannerisms required to ensure continuous delight and laughter from the audience. Adam most definitely brought this character to life, clearly enjoyed the role and loved being back on stage. The role of Alberto screams out for an 'over the top' performance and Adam delivered this superbly as he became increasingly more and more outrageous. It was the unexpected 'Latins Know Best', accompanied by an on-stage strip tease, which simply 'stole the show' and left the audience howling for more!

Jonny Clines (Bates) was a wonderful comic foil to Jerry Travers and a delight to watch. This is a fabulous role to play and quite clearly something that Jonny thoroughly enjoyed. The various quotes, together with impressively good accents, were delivered perfectly. Body language, facial expression and character development were all excellent.

I feel it would be wrong of me NOT to give a very special mention to the female tap ensemble. Congratulations to Emily Bowers, Natalie Cave and Vicky Rice who, as Dance Captains, ensured all instructions from Kim Findlay, and attention to detail, were clearly transferred onto the stage. Quite simply the quality of the tap ensemble lifted this show to another level altogether. The dancing was

faultless with perfect timing, precision and energy in abundance. The depth of dancing skills was hugely impressive and the lead actors benefited from being surrounded by such quality. I was also delighted to see genuine smiles and enjoyment from all involved.

Costumes were from the Costume Workshop and managed by Phoebe Fleetham, Janet Huckle, Louise Bravery and Lesley Hope. These costumes were of an extremely high quality and the sheer number ensured the Costumes Team was kept very busy indeed. Costumes were gorgeous and exactly what the show deserved. They were ideal for the time period and most definitely added a richness and real 'touch of class'.

The set came from Scenic Projects and was of an outstanding quality. The sliding front panels, used instead of simple curtains, were superb in focusing attention (taxi carriage/plane/Dale looking over bridge) and in ensuring swift and seamless set changes. Stage Manager (Fiona Elliot) clearly had her hands full in ensuring everybody, and everything were in the right place at the right time. This was not an easy task given the amount of scenery and extensive use of backcloths and 'flies'. Congratulations to you and your crew (Katie Goddard, Sarah Grey, Will Prescott and Ben Waterhouse) - everything ran like clockwork...

Lighting was again managed by Richard Pike and delivered to the same consistently high standard as have previously observed. Sound was managed by Dave Gates and worked well throughout the entire show with all speaking/singing being clearly audible. Props were managed by Jonny Clines and Nicky Radford. These were of a high quality and appropriate for the time period.

Will Prescott and Kim Schenkelaars arranged the show programme which was of a high standard and clearly presented. I always enjoy seeing rehearsal photographs and reading cast biographies – it was a lovely touch to add these for every member of the large cast and not simply the principals. It was also pleasing to see that the programme was so well-supported by advertisers and for the prominent NODA reference.

On the surface this was supposed to be a story about love - boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, girl gets him mixed up with somebody else and eventually everything is sorted out... Yet for all the lavish costumes, the superb singing and wonderful dancing what struck me the most was the sheer fun of this show!

Congratulations again to everyone involved - I very much look forward to attending both 'A Murder is Announced' and 'Merrily We Roll Along' later in 2018.

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