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SALOS

'Kipps: The New Half a Sixpence Musical

Wyvern Theatre

20th October 2024 @ 7:30pm

Director: Russell Langdown

Associate Director: Sandra Gilbert

Musical Director: Richard Abrams

Choreographer: Gemma Langdown

Chorus Musical Director: Judith Sharp

Stage Manager: Sarah Wrixon

PLEASE NOTE:

Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what he sees at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance, and it is inevitable that his assessment will be effected by that knowledge.

The N.O.D.A. Representative's intention is to give an objective critique of the overall production and in particular the performance viewed. It should be remembered that any review of this nature can only be objective as far as the techniques used during the performance observed. Any criticisms expressed may not have been valid at other performances, and are only made to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.

It is hoped that the audience's appreciation of your efforts will have given everyone a lift and encouraged you to greater achievements in the future and that the observations made by the reviewer will prove helpful in improving future productions.

Report by Angus Sheppard-Hughes SW Regional Representative District 16

Kipps: The New Half a Sixpence Musical has a special place in my heart. This was my first production as a lead role and WOW it is a hard role to perform. As Kipps, which you may imagine, you spend your entire time on stage, not able to even stop for a moment to think about when your next line is, or to have a tiny sip of water (unless it is the Old Methuselah Four Star) and every dance routine seems to blend into the next. But amongst that, I feel you may get a new insight into the older musicals, and it gives you pause to look back on the musicals that shaped the wonderful world and hobby we have. And from the first moment young Kipps and Ann stood on stage, those feelings came flooding straight back to me.

That's enough of me getting soppy, because I feel the need to firstly say some thank yous. My first thanks is for the wonderful FOH staff at the Wyvern Theatre, having never been before I was a tad confused about where to go and who to see and everybody was so kind and helpful. And thank you so much for my programme! My second thanks is to the creative team who came to say hello before the performance, it was wonderful to meet you and I cannot wait to see what you do in the future, but more about the team later.

When entering the theatre, I was met by a simple set to open on, with only a banjo and a suitcase DSR and a sign above centre stage with the title of the show. 6 floor to ceiling light blue patterned panels created a staggered look drawing attention to whatever it was opening up to each time, and the coloured pattern lent itself well to the theme of the show including the programme.

Each scene came with its own little twist and scenery change, and it took me a while to work out which piece of set turns around and forms another set piece, but not

once did anything look out of place. The use of depth and levels were inspiring and really reflected on the original London production, where you can see throughout that the creative team used as inspiration. My favourite set piece was everything in Lady Punnet's home, just teeming with upper-class-ness (if that's even a word).

Costumes were phenomenal, and I must once again immediately comment on the *Pick out a simple tune* costumes where everybody was in the same colour but with varying levels of lace incorporated in. A truly wonderful job by the **set and costume designers**.

Moving swiftly on to the creative team. **The direction** (by Russell Langdown and associate director Sandra Gilbert) was meticulously thought out, with some very clear choices in placements of the cast and the use of set and props that were available. A particular choice which I loved was after *Believe in Yourself* where Helen stayed on set until the lights came down. Just that moment longer gave me insight into her emotions, and I felt a lot more for Helen further into the show than I had even in my own production. Kudos to you, and a wonderful job.

Musical Direction (by Richard Abrams and Chorus work by Judith Sharp) was spot on. At times there were moments when I knew there was a harmony missing when the cast were singing the tune, but it never once detracted from the main action, which in my opinion works far better. That being said, there were many moments where there were harmonies plentiful, especially in *If the Rains got to Fall* when the ensemble of snooty upper-class cast members joined in the singing. This to me sounded perfect, a perfect replica of what is written in the score. You should be very proud of yourself.

Choreography (by Gemma Langdown) took great inspiration from the west end production and blended it so well with their own choreography that it was an amazing collaboration which gave the whole piece a polished effect. And it seems like you really took consideration into choreographing for those who were perhaps not natural dancers and gave more complex moments to those who were. An excellent display of both movement and dance, so congratulations.

Ann Pornick (Played by Ellen Sheridan) is a complex character who actually doesn't appear very frequently considering she is the leading lady and love interest of the leading man. The vocals were so good that I just added ticks upon ticks on my notes page each time you gave me shivers, and I cannot tell you how many there were as I lost count. Although I felt you held back a tiny bit on the penultimate "ago" when changing from the A to the B at the end of *Long Ago*, this may have been due to it being the last performance, but you have the power behind your voice, so never be afraid to use it. To blend so beautifully with Kipps throughout, from being children playing on the pier to then falling in love singing an incredible duet of *Long Ago (reprise)*, Ann never strayed from Kipps. Your acting through song is truly commendable as you portrayed such emotion in the little time you have on stage compared to your significant other, and I clearly understood the double-entendres in *Just a Little Touch of Happiness*. An excellent job, well done.

Mr. Chitterlow (portrayed by Tony Asprey) was a wonderful display of expressive artistry and eclectic taste in expressionism. With brilliant comedic timing and witty comments, you couldn't miss him, mostly because his voice was booming and his choice of clothing was...colourful. But nonetheless, Chitterlow became good friends with Kipps on his journeys and I do believe Kipps backed the right horse. Although there were a couple of moments when the performance dipped, and generally this was during a song, it picked up again during *Joy of the Theatre* and continued to improve throughout. Plus, you really got the audience going with your reprise of *Flash, Bang, Wallop!* at the end finishing the show on a high!

Helen Walsingham (played by Lucy Jenkins) is, in my opinion, a turn of the 20th century Princess Diana. Giving Kipps a chance, whilst never being condescending or rude to him, and it is her gentile soul which he originally falls in love with. With your Legit vocals filling the auditorium with crisp and warm tones, you gave heart to the show and were unfortunately the driving force for the negative things happening in Kipps' life. Whilst you may not be a dancer, your movements in both *If the Rains Got to Fall* and *Pick out a Simple Tune* were good, and Helen isn't much of a dancer anyway, she is there for her wonderful vocals, of which you definitely served us, and her tumultuous relationship with Kipps which left you rather emotional in the end.

Mrs Walsingham and James Walsingham (played by Nicky Ashdown and Stuart McQuade) together played the posh, overly spoilt and generally officious family of Helen. Mrs W. was an overbearing mother who "only wants what's best for her children" where in actual fact only thinks about herself. You were hilarious from the moment you stepped on stage and I knew exactly who you were the moment you spoke (never tell my mother, but she is exactly like this). Whereas James W. was extravagant and eclectic from the get-go, to show the differences between Kipps and James and their positions within their respective societies. There were some moments where I felt restraint on the larger mannerisms was needed in order to get the full extent of comedy from the lines, but you did this difficult character justice and both of these performances gave good depth and insight into Helens family.

Flo, Sid, Pierce and Buggins (played by Emily Louise Baker, Luke Browne, Jarred Cremin-Barnard and Freddie Bennett-Gray respectively) were the co-workers of Kipps in Shalfords Bazaar. Flo is clearly a strong vocalist and was effortless with her singing, blending so well with everybody she sang with, especially Ann in *Just a Little Touch of Happiness*. Sid was well portrayed as Ann's protective brother, who had some strong vocal moments, but it is clear you studied at Bird because your dancing was terrific, I couldn't take my eyes off you. Pierce has slightly less of a role in the show, which is a shame as in the original it was Pierce that was the brother of Ann, so to have the role stripped back so much is a shame, but you did an excellent job and particularly stood out to me in *Money to Burn Part 1* and during *In the Middle*. And finally Buggins, the lovable character with a whole lot of love for Flo, you played the part with miles of childish ambition and were instrumental in the cohesiveness of the workers.

The supporting characters of **Lady Punnett and Mr. Shalford** (played by Sarah Asprey and Paul Dawkins respectively) were also a treat to watch. Shalford gave a

great authoritative figure in the Bazaar and had a good relationship with **Carshot** (played by Holger Alsmeier). Whereas I only had a chance to write down my favourite Lady P lines, which were both about the emphasis on “Thanet” and “Baaaaaanjo”. Some brilliant acting happening here.

Before moving on, I would like to say well done to all the ensemble, you are what hold a society together, and are the glue in shows such as this. Your perseverance in tricky harmonies and complicated movements, patterns and dances is what creates the ambience on stage that make an audience swoon. I must say it is some of the best ensemble work I have seen in my time. So a huge congratulation to you all. Enjoy your rest before starting the next show.

And last but not least, I have had the pleasure of reviewing the actor playing **Arthur Kipps** (Rob Curnock) before, but in a very different capacity. This is a HUGE role, having played it not long ago, with something like a maximum of 10/12 minutes of time offstage for the whole show. It takes a person with stamina and conviction to do what you did, and I am truly in awe. You started off with an excellent comparison between young and older Kipps, reminding us of the simpler things in life, including the simple mistakes we can make. Your skills really shone in *Money to Burn part 2* for the whole section after drinking the Old Methuselah Four Star, dancing and singing so well that you held the ensemble together and kept the audience engaged throughout this long number and gave me shivers for your G natural on “Orchestra”. You looked really suave in *Proper Gentleman* and from that moment on you set the perfect pace for the rest of the show. Your pronunciation was excellent and you continued to make good acting choices throughout act 2. Ending the show with one of the wordiest songs in musical theatre, *Flash Bang Wallop*, after just completing the whole show barely coming off stage, it is truly an enormous feat you have completed. I hope you are proud of yourself, and I cannot wait to review whatever it is you do next.

Thank you SALOS, I can't wait to see 9 to 5 The Musical if I am invited and also to Evita. Now go and have a well deserved rest.

These comments solely reflect the view of the representative and can only relate to the performance seen.