



Society : Epsom Players
Production : The Wedding Singer
Date : September 17th, 2022
Venue : Epsom Playhouse
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It has been some time since I last visited the Epsom Playhouse and it was a pleasure to have done so on this occasion. Unfortunately, your regular NODA Representative, Phil Wilcox, was unable to attend on this occasion and hence my emergency coverage. Thanks to Paul Falconer and Darren Flick for the warm welcome and chat on arrival.

This upbeat production is set in New Jersey and based on the hugely successful film starring Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore. Popular wedding singer Robbie holds ambitions of being in a rock band but is actually stuck in what must be one of the most romantic jobs in the world. After being dumped at the altar himself, Robbie becomes hugely depressed and loses all hope. Suddenly realising that he's fallen in love with Julia, Robbie must try to win her love before she gets married to Glen...

Congratulations must first go to Katy Jackson who, as Director, was responsible for the overall success of *The Wedding Singer*. This production had all the markings of hard work coupled with plenty of energy and pace throughout. The cast had been carefully selected and well-rehearsed. Attention to detail was obvious and this can only be achieved through commitment, dedication and hours of preparation. The split-level set, with stairs on each side afforded an uncluttered stage and ample space for the large cast.

Dennis Hooker is to be congratulated as Musical Director and for leading an excellent band from the orchestra pit. The quality of all singing was superb and there had obviously been much rehearsal time spent ensuring precision and accuracy in all numbers. When required, the entire Company 'came together' in style and delivered both excellent harmonies and a wonderful sound for the audience to enjoy. The balance was ideal and the underscore never overpowered any singing.

Paul Madeley certainly delivered as Choreographer for this production and ensured each number was both unique and a visual treat for the audience to enjoy. The entire cast brought precision to the routines and it was great to see male dancers onstage. It was the quality of dance, and energy from the entire cast, that most impressed with the choreography throughout being a definite highlight.

Recognition must first be given to the principals who had all been well-cast and were of an exceptionally high standard. They had clearly worked extensively on their individual characters and it was delightful to watch various relationships blossom. Excellent stage presence from each with quality vocals, and the high standard of acting, I've been aware of from Epsom Players.

Chris Witham was terrific in his portrayal of Robbie and is a truly seasoned performer whose excellent singing and acting skills were immediately obvious. This part required Chris to bring many emotions, highs and lows, happiness and total despair to his performance which he handled with ease.

Sophie-Lee Colchester was superb in the challenging role of Julia. Playing opposite Robbie, Sophie-Lee gave a splendid performance adding both charm and glamour to the show. This was a heart-warming performance and one that included some emotional scenes and excellent singing.

Together, Chris and Sophie-Lee elevated what was a fine show and production into something of a truly high quality. Epsom Players can boast a deep level of star performers as this show amply proved. 'Grow Old with You' was a beautiful number and sung with real emotion making their romantic relationship believable.

Robbie's bandmates Sammy and George, played by Chris Madden and Dan Brickwood respectively, provided contrasting characters and great support for Robbie. Chris was the slightly calmer and more respectable of the two, with a very extravagant blonde wig which went well with the character. Dan played the role of the effeminate George very well and certainly had the audience laughing throughout. This Boy George wannabe certainly looked the part and 'George's Prayer' was both unexpected and fabulous.

Melissa Rochowska gave a very strong performance as Julia's 'happy go-lucky' friend Holly. Demonstrating both fine acting and vocal skills Melissa added much humour in her role and made a good partnership with Sammy. 'Saturday Night in the City' was a terrific number and the duo 'Right in Front of your Eyes' was another favourite.

Akhil Gowrinath created an excellent character as Glen and was terrific in his role. I liked the attempted suaveness and obsession with money. It was the sleazy edge that definitely suited the part and gave the audience a 'baddie' to dislike. 'All About the Green' was brilliant to watch and Akhil demonstrated fine vocal skills here.

Victoria Swaine was brilliant as 'crazy' Linda and certainly made sure every second of time onstage counted. Finally getting her long overdue 'come uppance', Victoria ensured this character had a certain emptiness and real self-loathing. Her rendition of 'A Note from Linda' was certainly one of the highlights for me.

Karen Paterson simply made me laugh as Robbie's sex mad grandmother Rosie. Karen's vocal skills were impressive in 'A note from Grandma' but 'Move That Thing', with George, was fabulous. It was the physical acting involved in playing a grandmother that really impressed. The shell suit and Madonna exercise were hilarious.

Sophie Toyer played the role of Angie, Julia's mother, with nice empathy towards her daughter.

Lisa Allen, Will Brown, Steve Cox, Suzanne Gadilhe, Vicky Hansell, Antoine Hatem, Tyrone Haywood, Matt Howes, Justine Hughes, Anya Le-Galloudec, Nick Mead, Lara Paterson, Harriet Rose Pollard, Rachel Rees, Suzanne Reeve, Susanne Sinisalu, Katrina Sweeney, Ed Thomson, Sophie Toyer, Natasha Walter and Caron Warner are all to be congratulated for their commitment to this production.

Whilst the principals enjoy 'the limelight', it is important to recognise the energy, commitment and quality demonstrated by the ensemble who provided excellent support and greatly added to the overall success of this production. Whether it was a cameo role (I loved Billy Idol) or a dancer – you were certainly noticed and certainly appreciated. I thought that the character work and storytelling from the background cast was fantastic and you were fabulous to watch. The men's version of 'Single' was hilarious. I also loved the 'Finale' which marked a terrific ending to the show.

Sarah Wood (Stage Manager) together with Dom Solly (DSM), Amanda Elsbury-Quinn and Phillipa Stone (ASMs) are to be congratulated. In any production, it is crucial that stage management should be highly organised and runs with seamless precision. This was certainly the case here as everything simply flowed and attention remained firmly on the show itself. A special mention also to the busy stage crew for their hard work and efficiency.

Kath Rogers, Amanda Elsbury-Quinn and Jo Epps deserve huge credit for co-ordinating the extensive collection of quality outfits. Both the variety, and quantity, of costumes and wigs was greatly impressive and certainly added to the overall appeal of this production. Tracey Townsend and Stewart Epps combined to manage a range of Props and these were of a good standard being appropriate for the time period and setting.

Stuart Vaughan, Jacky Cook and Stuart Gedall-Epps were responsible for Sound with Simon Banks and Dominic Lawrence handling Lighting. The Followspots were well-run by Claire Freed, Lisa Waugh and Pat Waugh. Overall, the entire technical crew is to be credited for their efforts. Simply put, there were no issues to mention which is not as easy, or as common, as you might suppose.

Paul Falconer is to be congratulated for co-ordinating the delivery of an exceptional programme that was not only extensive in size but also packed with information. Paul Madeley is responsible for the excellent photos and artwork which, together with some great cast and production team biographies, gave the audience plenty to enjoy reading. Including support for the Royal Marsden was a nice touch, as was the collection after the performance. It was also pleasing to see this bright and colourful programme being so well supported by advertisers and, of course, the prominent NODA reference.

I would like to suggest that Epsom Players submit this programme into the **NODA London Poster & Programme Competition 2022-2023**. The current competition period runs from 1st January 2022 to 31st December 2022 and the deadline for entries is 31st January 2023. Simply download the entry form, from the below web link, and submit together with five programmes.

<https://www.noda.org.uk/regions/london/noda-london-poster-programme-competition-2023>

Congratulations to everyone at Epsom Players, and especially those involved with *The Wedding Singer*, for an excellent afternoon's entertainment. It was a pleasure to have provided emergency cover for this such a fabulous production and I'd be delighted to return again if ever needed...

Des Wilby
Regional Representative
NODA London District 3