

THE ISLE OF THANET NEWS

Review: The Pajama Game

December 17, 2018 Kathy Bailes



This hugely enjoyable musical frothed from beginning to end like a delicious glass of champagne. The whole production was a testament to the British genius for amateur dramatics in general and the wealth of acting, singing and dancing talent in Thanet in particular. Without exception, the cast threw themselves with enthusiasm and energy into their respective parts and gave a performance that in many cases rose above the level of 'amateur'. The lead players may not always have managed to hit the highest notes, but in general the voices were strong and the acting never failed to hold the audience's interest and excite their appreciation.

The storyline harks back to the 1950s and there was a simple nostalgia to be had from experiencing the work life, fashions and music of the times, and even the gender stereotypes from the period, including the despotic male factory boss, the assertive male managers and the strong and feisty yet undeniably subservient female employees seemed almost charmingly amusing to our modern eyes. At the same time it could be said that the capitalist theme of the boss exploiting his employees by himself pocketing the money earmarked as a workers' pay rise is perfectly topical today. One only has to think of recent cases of exorbitant bonuses and misused pension funds.

Hasler, the factory boss in question, was given a larger than life, even caricature, treatment by Nick Rankin, who delivered a memorable performance complete with grizzly American accent.

The leading female character, 'Babe' Williams, was superbly and professionally played by musical veteran Erin Taylor, who also directed the production. With her confident and powerful singing voice and accomplished acting ability, she was a worthy heir to Doris Day, who starred in the 1957 film version of the original Broadway musical. Her American accent was perfectly convincing, as indeed was that of the rest of the cast, though a special mention has to be made of Sharon Liff who played Mabel, the office secretary. Her acting, delivery and accent was nothing short of immaculate. The handsome new superintendent at the factory, and general new man on the block, Sid Sorokin, counterpointing and partnering Babe, was given a convincingly virile treatment by Oliver Standeven.

The story of the factory producing 'Sleep Tite' pyjamas is, of course, as frivolous and light hearted as any undemanding American musical. The time and motion man, Hinse, nicely played by Mick Gore, spurs on the workers at the behest of the boss to our amusement; Sid, the latest addition to the ever-changing management, proves to be his own man rather than the boss' poodle and predictably falls in love with Babe, a strong-willed member of the union committee, who reciprocates. Tension builds as the union demands a seven and half cent per hour rise and this conflict results in Sid having to fire Babe.

There are many pleasant interludes in between, including a staff picnic and a gorgeous passage where union man and womaniser Prez, energetically played by James Coare, dreams of what seven and a half cents an hour multiplied by hours per week, weeks per year and years per decade will mean to his eventual income and purchasing ability, which includes an 'automatic washing machine' and a holiday abroad. It is a reminder of how far we have all come in the West since the 1950s. Two songs which have been evergreen hits ever since also enlivened the proceedings and sent a wave of recognition through the audience: 'Hernando's Hideaway' and 'Hey There (You With The Stars In Your Eyes)'. The story ends with Sid uncovering Hasler's fraudulent pocketing of the workers' money, forcing Hasler to grant a rise and in so doing winning back Babe. Love triumphs and the ending is predictably and, of course, satisfactorily happy.

An accomplished orchestra provided the music, and the sets and choreography were equally excellent. The Ramsgate Operatic Society can justly be proud of notching up yet another musical success.

Review by Richard Lewis