



Philip Smith

Noda NE District 6 Reg Rep

Croft House Theatre Company have been performing high quality musicals since 1902 with hundreds and probably thousands of local actors taking to the stage to entertain their audiences taking on a never ending list of block buster musical productions . Sunset Blvd being the current musical full of intrigue and obsessive desires to achieve the un-achievable. A production with amazing sets, so many character parts, a musical score demanding quality voices and stamina along with musicians of the highest order. Croft House with the immense talent and experience of their Director and Choreographer Claire Harriott pulls out every stop with such well-rehearsed direction, shaping and delivery that all the cast have taken on. The commitment to achieve these standards takes a dedicated team of actors working closely together to provide the results clearly there to see.

Unlike many modern day shows this production, being mainly acted through song, requires additional skills, the ability to entertain the audience whilst telling an ever evolving story keeping the pace and emotion building through such deep meaningful scenes, and retaining the highest level of singing to deliver the challenging Andrew Lloyd Webber score. Matt Symonds as MD certainly deserves credit for his clear guidance and professionalism in enabling the actors to achieve such standards with an extremely hard rehearsal process and once in the theatre the 20-piece orchestra was simply awesome. The quality was worth the ticket money alone. I must reference the production team for their vision , having the drive to provide the stunning set that worked perfectly in the many and varied scenes. The use of projections featuring some of the original Norma Desmond's, the car chase and more simply added to the story as it skipped into the past history of Norma Desmond during her years of stardom in the silent movie era. I was very impressed with the almost seamless scene changes which other than the odd curtain leg not fully closing was carried out to the highest order, so much so that occasionally scenes had completely changed without notice. Compliments to the SM, Paul Minott and all his team.

Other than a slight mic issue at the beginning the sound by Nick Greenhill was excellent allowing the performers and orchestra to be heard clearly, beautifully complementing each other. Not an easy task with such a large orchestra involved. The lighting by Gary Longfield was excellent throughout providing so many subtle changes as the moods of the production evolved.

Joe Gillis performed by James Smith, a screenwriter struggling to achieve, from his opening solo of 'Prologue' through to 'What's Going on Joe' along with the 21 other numbers he was involved in gave a truly powerful performance, moving through so many moods as scenes with Betty , Norma , Max Artie and the ensemble built . His desire to succeed became overruled by the attentions of Norma , until he realizes he is becoming more and more trapped culminating in falling for Betty and destroying Normas dream of returning to the stage , with tragic consequences.

Betty Schaefer performed by Catherine Harban, another aspiring writer joining forces with Joe after reading his script, along with an evolving relationship building with Joe whilst being engaged to his friend Artie, a wonderful performance with lovely characterization and excellent singing. Involved in many of the songs I really enjoyed 'Girl Meets Boy' and in Act 2 'Too Much in Love to Care' with Joe .

Max performed by Richard Carlin, Norma's butler, a truly disciplined role throughout maintaining Norma's desire to return to the stage even though knowing it would never happen, loyalty of the highest order protecting Norma against all who would question her. Top quality acting with rich beautiful singing.. 'The Greatest Star of All' in Act 1 along with 'New Ways to Dream' in Act 2 being two such examples. Artie Green performed by Matthew Walker , strong visual performance with polished acting and singing. Lovely scenes with Betty and Joe , showing the evolving emotions when realizing Betty's feelings strengthen with Joe.

Cecil B De Ville performed by Steve Mather, a well-executed role showing poise and discipline from your first, no speech or song entrance, through to your meeting and interaction with Norma as she dreamt of the return to the stage. Your delivery of 'Was That Really Norma Desmond' delivered with such purpose and meaning.

Manfred / Myron performed by Mark Harris, two very different roles both showing true performance skills , along with a rich voice, I particularly enjoyed ' The Lady's Paying' along with a number of cameo scenes throughout.

Sheldrake / John performed by John Crowther , two very different character parts performed well. Powerful acting through song and cameo scenes within the 'Paramount Conversations' and others.

And then there is .. Norma Desmond performed by Mary Kingsnorth . the star of so many silent movies and dreaming of a return to the adoration of so many fans or maybe not. This iconic role, one of the most sought after female lead roles , demands so many attributes from the actor. The ability to show weakness and strength, a genuine belief in what she believes is true, her desire to take control of Joe, an unerring acceptance of the loyalty that Max shows and more. The ability to portray these skills through song, excellent body language and stage presence. I felt you mastered all these to a high degree culminating in the outstanding final scenes with such power and poise.

The remaining ensemble, taking varying cameos all performed well with clearly delivered song , lovely well-rehearsed dancing in the many and varied scenes. The discipline was clear to see along with great stage experience throughout the production. The costumes were excellent and fitted the time period well.

This is a production I hadn't seen before but thoroughly enjoyed the whole evening , along with being delighted that you received a most deserved standing ovation.

Thanks also to the front of house team who made us very welcome.

Don't miss this excellent production , yes different to many currently being performed but containing so much song, music ,acting , and more.