

Smooth sailing on first night

Review

by **Jacque Dean**

Lifestyle Correspondent
e-mail newsdesk@westgaz.co.uk

SEATS are still available, as we go to press, for Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society's one-week production of Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*. This is a sparkling production in every sense; colour, vitality, warmth, humour, great characterisations and familiar foot-tapping songs.

This is the first Octagon Theatre, Yeovil production for director Scott St Martyn, but his work is well known in the area, having directed in Weymouth and Taunton. He must be delighted with his first YAOS production, which on its first night showed no evidence of the ill health of cast members, which is reported to have dogged final rehearsals.

A simple and well-devised set, represents a ship en route to Europe from the USA. The quality orchestration is under the skilful direction of Lynne Merrifield. On board are society figures, including New York Queen of nightlife, Reno Sweeney. Reno provides the central character for the tale, brilliantly carried by Vivienne Patterson. The story is a simple one, of love lost and gained, gangsters and accomplices and with a pantomime-like ending where all live happily ever after.

There are some great chorus numbers and among the best is the big tap dance number at the end of first act, from which the show gets its name.

Another musical highlight is the Sailor Quartet's *There'll Always be a Lady Fair* from Duncan Wright, Mark Rudd, Richard Bennett and Chris Milton. Chorus and dancers, many in supporting roles, are all beautifully costumed and all bring their own style and interpretation to their performance. None more so than Reno's raunchy Angels played by Kirsty Beaumont, Charmain Bray, Sally Dixon and Sarah Hazeldine.

Chorus and supporting roles: Clive Jesty and Norman Dunstan as the comical Chinamen, Duncan Wright as the Captain, Richard Walters as the Purser, Roy Bartlett as Henry T Dobson, William Scott-Robinson, Anne Bayes, Sally Carpenter, Annette Hamilton, Richard Green, Rob Stephens. Dancers: Helena Horsley, Loma Livingstone, Sarah Long, Nicola Woodham, Sarah Quarrington, Julia Waddleton, Ian Ball, Shaun Driver, Andy Fane, Steve Johnstone, Grant Sellen and Richard Walters.

The key characters are perfectly defined and have a certain informality

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that makes them completely credible.

Central to the action is the versatile Paul Brolly playing Billy Crocker, a rising Wall Street executive intent on regaining the love of Hope Harcourt (played by Paul's wife Marie) whose mother has persuaded her of the financial benefits of a marriage to Lord Evelyn. The role of Hope's mother, Evangeline, is in the capable hands of Jean Hughes, whose character was enhanced by the company of Cheeky, played by delightful Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Thomas. Chris Burdon plays Elisha, Billy's Wall Street boss with a liking for alcohol, a role which could quite easily be overplayed, but which is handled well.

Ben Woolf's portrayal of Lord Evelyn is hilarious and he received thunderous applause for *The Gypsy in Me*.

Great comedy demands great timing and delivery and there is no shortage of these skills from the entertaining Andrew Helson as Moonface Martin (Public Enemy No 13) and Karen Burdon as the gangster's moll and sex kitten, Erma.

As always those on stage were outnumbered by the production team led by stage manager Geoff Thresh, and the front of house, business team and executives and Assistant to the Producer, Sheila Driver, all of whom are to be congratulated.

Anything Goes runs until Saturday 11 October.



SAILORS' DELIGHT: Karen Burdon shines on stage as the gangster's moll, Erma. Below: The cast of *Anything Goes*. Pictures by David Bendell.

