



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: **Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society**

Name of Production: **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**

Venue: **Westland Entertainment Centre, Yeovil**

Date: **Tuesday 18th March 2025**

Adjudicator: **Nicholas Goodall**

**Strong performances, wonderful music and irrepressible energy
underlined a hugely entertaining production**

Director: Martyn Knight
Assistant Director: Sheila Driver
Musical Director: Gill Merrifield

Based on the famous children's book by Roald Dahl, the musical version of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* features an original score by Marc Shaiman with lyrics by Shaiman and Scott Wittman (*Hairspray*) and a book by David Grieg. The score also pays homage to the Leslie Bricusse/Anthony Newley score from the 1971 film of the same name with some songs from the motion picture such as *The Candy Man* and *Pure Imagination*. It is very definitely a show of two halves with Act 1 taking place in the Bucket house, on the street and at the Candy Store, interspersed with scenes which introduce each of the Golden Ticket winners in their respective countries. Act 2 is set entirely in Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory with just the winners, their family members and Wonka himself as our guide, helped by his team of oompa loompas. The cast requires a mix of children and adult parts and in common with modern practice you had two different actors playing the part of Charlie and two teams in the junior ensemble although the other ticket winners, who can be played by children, were played by slightly older members of your society. The show I attended had Charlie played by Noah Morgan with Team Loompa providing the junior ensemble members. Apologies to Thomas and the Oompa team for not being able to comment on your performances.

I find Roald Dahl's mix of eccentric, grotesque characters and strong moral messaging not that easy to stomach as a writer, but the musical version of *Charlie and the Chocolate*

Factory is a much lighter affair, with ridiculous, over-the-top characters, knockabout comedy and high energy musical numbers mixed with some more intimate, touching moments of reflection. Your very strong cast and excellent twelve-piece orchestra together with some outstanding musical direction from Gill Merrifield, raised this YAOS production to something approaching professional levels at times and I found myself completely absorbed in the entertainment that unfolded. The wealth of detail in the scoring which underpinned the action, which included a lot of scene change and underscore music was beautifully realised and never allowed to dominate the vocals, even under dialogue. Together with some clever lighting, back projections and beautiful costumes, this show was a visual and aural treat from start to finish, so many congratulations to all involved in presenting such a dynamic piece of story-telling.

Below are some comments and notes for each department involved, and for each of the principals.

Staging

The wide stage at the Westland Entertainment Centre is quite sizeable but has little wing space which poses some challenges in putting on a musical of this complexity. The fixed set elements consisted of two sections of chocolate factory on either side of the main stage complete with grilles, pipework and entrance doors at floor level. The main stage was left fairly empty with a fixed flat painted as a wall SL. Steps led from the floor level to a small apron at the front of the stage which was used for entrances and exits (particularly the oompa loompas in Act 2) and large Wonka Chocolate bar posters were attached to the front of the stage. These fixed elements were beautifully constructed and really added to the strong thematic design of the show as did the use of the colour purple which was carried through into the marketing material and even the pages of the programme.

The really striking element of the show was the use of animated projections on the wide rear wall of the auditorium. These were cleverly linked, forming colourful, artistic backdrops for each scene change which became increasingly animated in Act 2 as Wonka takes his charges on a journey through the factory. I don't know if these were produced in-house or bought in but they really brought the fantasy elements of the show to life and provided a wonderful variety of settings for the different and sometimes rapidly changing locations in the story. The unity of style in these projections helped to give the show a homogeneity which pulled the narrative together. The glass elevator ride which Charlie and Willy Wonka take at the end was particularly well done but all the animated slides had some lovely details which brought the scenes to life - a bird flying across the sky, some twinkling street lights in the scenes with Mrs Green or the 'flying' paper plane message which Charlie launched at the end of *A Letter From Charlie Bucket*. The use of the TV screen image as Jerry introduced his roving correspondent Cherry allowed for quick transitions to each new location as the Golden Ticket winners were revealed and we got to meet the four winning families. This was slickly done, particularly the swift transformation from Candy Shop to Bavaria and back after the scene with Augustus Gloop and his mother. The animations in Act 2 at different locations within the factory were wonderful and helped with the story telling, not least the demise of Augustus Gloop. The imaginative blueprints of Charlie's chocolate creations as he wrote down his ideas at the end of the show were also a lovely touch.

Some good props were essential to make the story work and your team had certainly put in a lot of work to create them. Perhaps the most important of these was the bed (large enough to accommodate Charlie's four grandparents!) in the Bucket household which featured quite prominently in Act 1. This had to be wheeled on and off fairly smartly on a number of occasions with all four grandparents on board! Your team of stage hands were certainly given some work to do but together with you other major props - the Candy Store counter in Act 1 and Willy Wonka's various factory contraptions in Act 2 for example - the movement of the bed was seamless and subtle.

The elements you had created for the Chocolate Factory in Act 2 were beautifully realised. I loved the *Pure Imagination* scene where the wonderfully produced candy floss, flowers and lollipops in vivid colours were complemented by the rainbow colours of the backdrop, chocolate waterfall and subtle use of dry ice. A truly magical scene. This attention to detail was carried through into small objects - the Bucket's coat stand, pot and pan - and into the large props such as the wonderful TV set into which full-size objects (including Mike) were absorbed in Act 2. It was clear how much work had gone into making these props and the visual elements of the show were a real strength.

Lighting Overall the lighting was impressive and well designed, giving us the changes of mood that were needed as the story unfolded. You weren't afraid to lower the lighting and make use of dark areas of the stage, notably for the scenes in the Bucket household in Act 1 where the action took place SR. The use of projected backdrops provided instant mood changes which were complemented by the lighting plots.

The quick transition from bright lights in each of the winning ticket scenes - for example the jolt you got from the glamour and brashness of Violet Beauregarde's California to the muted and intimate Bucket house - was slick and powerful. I especially liked the effect of the single spot on Grandpa Joe and Charlie as they ascended to the attic in Act 2 and the silhouette created as Charlie and Willy Wonka turned their backs to the audience in the finale. You used lighting for comic effect too with the flashing red light alarm as Augustus Gloop is swallowed up and the flaming lights as Violet is torn limb from limb by the squirrels.

Cues were sharply operated and added to the atmosphere. Low lighting used to highlight the more subtle and tender moments switched deftly to the reds, purples and blues which accompanied some of the bigger moments such as Violet's demise SR as an exploding blueberry and bathing Wonka in green and purple in *It Must be Believed to be Seen*. Dry ice was used sparingly but effectively in the street scenes and the golden light for the scene where Charlie achieves his dream and tickets rained down was beautifully realised. Congratulations should go to Danny Norris for the lighting design and to the lighting technicians from the Octagon Theatre. You really had the measure of the requirements in this show.

Sound was nicely balanced and the mix gave some real definition to the different instrumental sounds from the band. The balance between the band and the singers was also excellent, and in the moments when there was underscore or in the introductions to songs or under dialogue, I could hear every word. Dialogue was audible throughout and there were no glitches or missed cues. Above all, the sound was never overwhelming even though I was seated right at the front of the theatre.

The use of sound effects in Act 2 for comic effect was deftly controlled and added greatly to the humour, particularly the 'maze' scene. Without any objects to actually negotiate we

were given some lovely moments of mime from the cast which were coordinated brilliantly with the wind tunnel or 'frying pan' and 'gong' sounds. This technical achievement was another stand out in the show's success.

Costumes I understand you hired some of the costumes in and sourced others yourselves. I'm sure the uniformity required for groups in certain scenes made this necessary. The squirrels were suitably funny in their onesy outfits complete with tails as were the blue dirndls and lederhosen of the Bavarian dancers. The costumes were a wonderful mix of down to earth contemporary and colourful eccentricity as befits the multitude of characters in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. We had Charlie in his brown courdroy, striped jumper and beanie hat, Mr Beauregard and Mr Salt in their sharp suits and Mike Teavee in his modern T-shirt and fatigues. The fabulously colourful costumes really popped on the stage: Willy Wonka was obviously a stand-out in his eccentric waistcoat and tails at the beginning of Act 1 and throughout the second half, as were the Oompa Loompas in their uniform green tops and bright orange dungarees and hats. Indeed, the colour orange appeared frequently - the Gum Chompin Divas in their matching jogging suits, Mike's orange fleece, Mrs Gloop's skirt and top and Willy Wonka's waistcoat to name but a few. Together with the colour purple (also featured as Wonka's tail coat and Violet's jogging suit) this use of repeat colours really brought the colour palette of the show together. Having the chorus in Act 1 and the Bucket household dressed in their drab (slightly fifties?) outfits contrasted wonderfully with other bright colours of the magical, surreal and slightly steam punk world of Willy Wonka and his factory. A lot of care and attention to detail had gone into the wardrobe, not least the wigs, which was an important part of the look of the whole production and there was so much attention to detail. I really loved this aspect of the show.

Choreography The choreography in this production was clever and highly entertaining. You had clearly pushed your cast to learn their routines regardless of experience and while it is usual to have choreography nuanced to suit the abilities of the team you are working with, there was no evidence of this here - everyone was engaged in the full ensemble numbers like *The Candy Man* and the numbers in Act 2 which included all the oompa loompas. Individual scenes, especially those in Act 1 when the four Golden Ticket winners were introduced were a visual treat. I especially liked the Bavarian scene with the Gloops and of course, Violet and her Gum Chompin Divas. The big set piece numbers were suitably impressive too but so were the more intimate moments and you could rely on both principals and ensemble to deliver the movement you needed. Having smaller groups working with the principals in certain scenes provided variety and scenes like the squirrels dancing with Veruca were a real treat. The hard work that must have gone into this aspect of the show was clear to see and your joyous routines were infectious.

Band

Having the band off-stage brings both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand you can balance the instrumentation more easily in the mix as there is no ambient sound to deal with and it allows for some tight playing (which was very much in evidence). On the other hand, you miss the visceral experience of live music in the same space as the on-stage performers and the immediacy this brings. For this show it worked brilliantly. At no point did I feel the band was overwhelming, which is another plus point of having the players tucked away - the balance between band and singers was just about right throughout the show. Very strong musical direction from Gill Merrifield meant there

were never any ensemble issues using a relay and given the size of the venue, having a reasonable sound level was a bonus in a show with so many big numbers and with so much incidental music.

One real highlight for me was the quality of the instrumental playing from your twelve-piece outfit. There was a precision in the rhythm which was essential to the success of this score and I liked the variety of timbres you managed to get from your players, especially the three keyboard players who provided a fabulous string sound, accordion, harp and any number of other instrumental sounds. The mixture of two brass, two reeds and two string players together with your rhythm section was beautifully done and there were some lovely solos such as the violin at the end of *Pure Imagination* or the guitar work in *The Queen of Pop*.

You had the band playing in an upstairs room away from the auditorium using a relay to the sound system. The sound was terrific - nicely balanced and full of instrumental detail with plenty of bass and rhythmic punch from the kit. You are certainly fortunate to have such a great bunch of musicians. As a musician myself I really appreciated the quality of your performance which sounded for all the world out the front like a pre-recorded, professional orchestra. Congratulations Gill on your work with the cast and the band. This was a real stand-out in the success of the show

Principals

Willy Wonka - Nick Toop

This was a bravura performance! You really embraced the role, bringing the perfect mixture of charm, unpredictability and menace to the part and in Act 2, where you are in nearly every scene, you certainly stole the show as Willy Wonka steers his Golden Ticket winners through the tour of his chocolate factory. Willy Wonka is a strange, typically Dahl-esque character, managing to be enchanting and sinister all at once. He has to be full of nervous energy, lithe and eccentric, dashing around the stage and moving the action along at pace and you duly delivered all of this. At least, this is the case in Act 2. Act 1 is a different story as Wonka is largely hiding in plain sight as the Candyman in his Candy Store apart from in the opening and closing scenes where you proved your song and dance credentials in the extended routines complete with cape and walking stick.

Your singing was very strong throughout; there was always plenty of attitude and crystal clear delivery, nowhere more so than in the furiously paced patter lyrics in *Strike That Reverse It*, which was excellent. I never missed a word, either in the dialogue or in the song vocals and your energy seemed inexhaustible from beginning to end. There's no question your portrayal of Willy Wonka drove the show along, providing the pace and vitality needed of the part.

Wonka's larger than life persona can go from charming and comical, to magically mysterious and dark at the drop of a hat and it is not until the final scene with Charlie that we see any real empathy for anyone from Willy Wonka. Being able to switch so easily between these flighty personas is no mean feat and your gestures, facial expressions and gift for physical comedy was on show from first to last - the 'maze' scene in the factory was brilliantly done. This was a classy, highly polished performance - a tour-de-force in a big role which would have graced the professional stage.

Charlie Bucket - Noah Morgan

You split the role of Charlie between two young actors for these performances and I am only able to comment on Noah's performance so apologies to Thomas from Team Oompa.

This is a very big part and you rose to the challenges of playing Charlie wonderfully Noah. You are a talented young performer who brought consistency and confidence to the character. The role in the show is written as an overblown and rather inexact interpretation of Dahl's original character from the book. This Charlie is not so much a 'malnourished, fatigued-but-noble youth' who values everything he has because his family have nothing. Instead Charlie is much more saccharine-sweet, healthy and exuberant, smart, hopeful and loving. Above all, he has lots of energy and you played his wide-eyed innocence and vulnerability really well.

Charlie has quite a bit to sing on his own compared with some of the characters in the show. I think you struggled a bit to reach the bottom end of the register in *I've Got a Golden Ticket*, but otherwise your voice was assured and intonation solid throughout. It is quite a feat to be able to strike a balance between pluck and pathos and you managed both very well, giving a charming rendition of the Act 1 song *Willy Wonka! Willy Wonka!*. I felt you were particularly strong when acting alongside Steve Williams as Grandpa Joe and Jennifer Holland-Brewer as Charlie's mother - these family relationships were touching and heartfelt and you managed to communicate directly with the audience in the moments of reflection and tenderness, particularly in the letter scene. I also completely bought into your increasing disbelief as each of your fellow Golden Ticket winners fell by the wayside in Act 2. You certainly created a believable character - full of humility, naivety and hope. You have great promise as a performer; this was a very accomplished all-round performance.

Grandpa Joe - Steve Williams

You did a lovely job in bringing Grandpa Joe to life and I really bought in to your relationship with Charlie. Grandpa Joe is Charlie's imaginative, fun, kind and loving grandfather, who gets to accompany Charlie on his visit to the factory after spending most of Act 1 wrapped up in bed with Charlie's other three grandparents. After many years being confined to the house, Grandpa Joe's childish energy returns when Charlie finds the Golden Ticket and you played this transformation beautifully. Grandpa Joe also gets to sing in several numbers, most notably in *Charlie, You and I*. You sang this with great assurance and a strong connection, not only with Charlie but with the audience. I certainly felt your version of Grandpa Joe was less whiny and more sprightly than the character is sometimes credited as being. He is listed in the musical as being 'ninety and a half' but you were definitely more energetic than that! It was lovely to see such an experienced actor taking on an iconic role and making it their own.

Mrs Bucket - Jennifer Holland-Brewer

Mrs Bucket is something of an anomaly in the show in that she is a serious, kind and relatively normal character who doesn't need to be larger than life. You played her, complete with London accent and a gentle demeanour, as a widowed mother should be: warm, kind-hearted and supportive of her family. We saw Mrs Bucket desperately wanting her son to succeed at school and concerned at his constant daydreaming but equally understanding of his lack of opportunity. I thought your beautifully touching rendition of *If Your Father Were Here* was a lovely moment of reflection, bringing real poignancy to the back-story when Charlie's deceased father appeared. You sang with great control and I could feel Mrs Bucket's longing for her lost love in every note.

This is an understated part which you really embraced. It's such a pity Mrs Bucket doesn't get to appear in Act 2 as I would have loved to have heard more of your voice!

Grandma Josephine - Charmaine Bray**Grandma Georgina - Pauline Withers****Grandpa George - Michael Francis**

As the three other grandparents act pretty much as a unit, singing some harmonies together as an ensemble in the three Act 1 numbers *A Letter from Charlie Bucket*, *If Your Father Were Here* and *I've Got a Golden Ticket*, I haven't considered these parts separately, so forgive me lumping you together. Your interactions in the Bucket household scenes were always on point and it was lovely to hear some of the harmony singing in those Act 1 numbers. Although you don't have a lot of dialogue between you, the grandparent's interjections have to be suitably quick-fire and your reactions believable even though you are sometimes left sitting on the bed for long periods while action happens around you.

Mrs Gloop- Lauren Francis

I'm not sure how PC the role of Mrs Gloop is these days but you certainly played up Augustus's German, quasi-Wagnerian mother with a great flair for comedy. You had a wonderfully mirthless smile as though it were affixed to the front of your face and played up her exaggerated accent which never slipped. Your scene with Augustus and the sausages at the beginning of Act 2 was a deliciously funny moment. You really made the most of the part and gave a fine cameo performance.

Augustus Gloop - Nicholas Riva

This was another strong performance. Augustus is described as having a 'rampantly over-active' appetite and you managed the humour, however grotesque, of an overweight and over-indulged boy being spoilt by his mother with great assurance and an understanding of comic timing. Despite your faux German accent I could hear both dialogue and vocals very clearly and *More of Him to Love*, your moment in the spotlight, was a moment to savour. Augustus does represent the sin of gluttony and has to be, along with other three children, monstrously obnoxious. Your fixed smile and enthusiasm for all things comestible, together with Augustus's over-the-top costume, made him an irresistible 'baddie' and I really enjoyed your performance.

Mr Salt - Luke Whitchurch

You gave a lovely portrayal of Veruca's affluent and doting father who finds it impossible to say no to his daughter's every indulgence. I liked the rich Russian accent and exaggerated mannerisms you gave Mr Salt as he gives in to every ridiculous demand his daughter makes of him. You certainly know how to milk a comic line and made the most of the role, giving the part a haughty, distracted and often hilarious characterisation. Your interplay with Amelia was convincingly cringe-worthy and your Act 1 song *When Veronica Says* was wonderfully delivered - one of the comedy highlights of the show without a doubt.

Veruca Salt - Amelia Meldrum

It's always lovely to get your teeth into the part of a unredeemably horrible character and you clearly relished the opportunity to play the vicious and determined Veruca. Playing her as a ballet dancer wouldn't have worked unless you were convincing and comfortable using classical ballet steps and you were more than a match for the choreography and movement required in the score as a dancer. Although we didn't get to hear a lot of singing from you in the role, you clearly have the voice to go with your dance credentials. Veruca's demise at the hands of the squirrels in the good nut /bad nut scene (danced appropriately

to some music quoting *The Nutcracker*) was highly entertaining and you had some real bite in *When Veruca Says*. Having an older and more experienced performer taking on the role worked well for me. I know Veruca is supposed to be twelve years old, but your stage presence, dance skills and petulant interactions with your father were all the stronger for being a more mature performer.

Mr Beauregarde - Callum Longmuir

You could really hold your own with Violet and the dancers in *The Queen of Pop*, knocking out the dance moves with energy and conviction. You certainly had the measure of Mr Beauregarde, Violet's ineffectual father who ignores his back-talking daughter, strutting your stuff and extolling her money-making virtues at every opportunity. Your accent was very convincing and stage movement always in character. I really felt you had little regard for Violet as anything other than a money-making machine and your fixed smile, sharp suit and dark glasses certainly added to the characterisation.

Violet Beauregarde - Josie Whitmore

The characterisations of the winning children in this show are vivid and playful and Violet, as 'The Queen of Pop' is no exception. You had to be an aspiring diva with strong dance skills and a voice to match and you didn't disappoint. Your delivery of the signature song, *The Queen of Pop*, was very strong with a suitably soaring vocal and some sharp dance moves together with the Gum Chompin Divas as your backing group. You gave Violet the right look of defiant arrogance and the scene in Act 2 when Violet ignores Willy Wonka's warning not to eat the gum you dealt very well with the physical transformation as Violet balloons into a giant blueberry. You carried it off with the right mixture of slapstick humour and monstrous horror. It's a pretty awful way to go after all!

As with the other children who win the Golden Tickets, Violet is wholly unlikeable, forward, and full of attitude but in this version of the story she also has to be believable as The Queen of Pop and you certainly were.

Mike Teavee - Harrison Waterhouse

In the musical version of the story, Mike is characterised as being obsessed with television, video games, and gadgets. He represents the vice of sloth or laziness and you played Mike with appropriate teenage angst and attitude as he resisted his mother's protectionism and control. Your singing was strong as the music transitioned from swing to something more upbeat in *That Little Man of Mine* and you negotiated the tricky key change at the beginning easily. Your facial expressions were a joy and you played the physical comedy in the scene where Mike negotiates the 'maze' under Willy Wonka's instructions with a great sense of comic timing. The final scene when Mike is shrunk to the size of the TV character was equally funny.

Mrs Teavee - Charlie Wanklin

I thought you played the boozy, over-protective Mrs Teavee with a wonderful touch. Complete with Dame Edna glasses, fifties cardigan, floral dress and hair bow, your delivery of the humour was both visual and verbal and the scene when you interacted with Mike shrunk down to the size of a doll in Act 2 was certainly one of the comedy highlights of the evening. You delivered the vocals in *That Little Man of Mine* brilliantly both in the Act 1 number and the reprise in Act 2 with a great sense of musical style and your last note - beautifully sustained! You are a very accomplished comedy actor and made the most of this delicious part. I would have loved to have heard more of your voice!

Mrs Green - Lucy Capes

Although a small part, Mrs Green does appear more than once in Act 1 and you have the scene where Charlie buys the all-important winning ticket in the chocolate bar from you towards the end of the first half. This was a nice little cameo role.

Cherry - Fawn Whitchurch

The part of Cherry is a small but significant role. As the young roving reporter who is always on the scene you get to introduce each of the Golden Ticket winners in Act 1 and your wonderfully cheesy TV smile, smart pink suit and interplay with studio-based Jerry was nicely done. You had a convincing American accent and brought a touch of credible zany humour to the part.

Jerry - Zack Welfare

The other member of the TV team bringing the latest news about the Golden Tickets, your largely off-stage role as Jerry, anchor man back in the studio who interacts with roving reporter Cherry was always very slick. Your characterisation was suitably stereotypical - the all-American reporter with a knowing glint in the eye and ring of confidence in delivery. It was a relatively small but deliciously well-measured portrayal.

Chorus

The depth of the talent in your society runs deep and the chorus, particularly the oompaloompas, were universally impressive. The singing from the chorus was rich and full with some great harmonies when needed and there was total engagement from everyone. I particularly liked *You Got Whatcha Want* and *Strike That Reverse It* in Act 2 but the opening number in Act 1, *The Candy Man*, was also beautiful not only to watch but to listen to and really set the tone for the whole evening. Small moments like the off-stage choral interjections in *Willy Wonka! Willy Wonka!* were also beautifully done as was the engagement of everyone as reporters and members of the public in *It Must Be believed to be Seen*. Lyrics were clear, lines were sharp and movement and dance always well coordinated. Your division of ensemble members into smaller groups paid off handsomely with the Gum Chompin Divas in the Bavarian routine and it was clear that everyone involved was totally invested in what they were doing.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is one of the most popular books in children's fiction, in part due to the extraordinary inventions and fantastic rooms that are described inside Wonka's factory. There is a real challenge in bringing that imagery to life on stage and your use of projections, particularly in Act 2 really made this happen. It was bold to leave the stage quite empty apart from some choice props and the mime sequence in Act 2 worked brilliantly. When you had invested in creating props such as the TV to shrink Mike Teavee in they were nicely realised and added enormously to the humour.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a show full of energy and laughter and the fact that the audience was on its feet almost as soon as the curtain calls commenced was testament to the level of enjoyment we'd been treated to from first to last. Despite some strange messaging for modern audiences in Dahl's story, the musical version is a light-hearted affair, and with a cast as talented and enthusiastic as yours, the sheer delight of this modern morality tale was pretty much guaranteed. Every department in this production impressed me. With the music performed so slickly and equally well-rehearsed choreography, you should be justly proud of the show you produced. Hats off to the creative team and every-

one at YAOS for putting on a show where the energy never dropped - the two hours plus running time flew by and I, like everyone around me in the theatre, wanted more.

Thank you for your kind hospitality and warm welcome. I look forward to seeing more of Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society's work in the future.

NG 02/04/25