

independent review

The Woodfield Entertainers **“These Days”**

Friday 13 May 2016

Thanks for the invite and the opportunity to review your recent production of These Days.

It was a compilation of songs and sketches, themed around a narration celebrating 50 years of marriage.

So often in amateur theatre the word ‘compilation’ is thought to be the ‘easy route’ of putting on a show rather than following an established script in a named show.

The opposite, however, is often the case. Compilations start with a completely blank canvass and you don’t have the luxury of a script and musical choices already in place.

There are also several pitfalls that compilations can fall into - most notably being too long or not getting the balance of material right.

You avoided the pitfalls and pulled off a thoroughly enjoyable evening’s entertainment, enjoyed by a sell-out audience who were also treated to a mid-show snack which looked great and was served efficiently without dragging out the interval.

Before running through the show I think your ticket prices are exceptionally good value - particularly considering the

catering element. I am sure it's a fine line and perhaps an increase in ticket prices might spoil the winning formula but most amateur shows are well north of £10 now without food!

At the beginning we were introduced to 'Felicity' and 'Rupert Smyth' who competently handled the narration throughout the show. This was accompanied by a TV monitor used to show photographs. The TV was quite small and I'm not sure fully effective from the back of the hall but appreciate cost restrictions.

The narration was two-fold of course - to stitch the show together but also, more practically, to allow scene changes.

I liked the narration and the prop box - genuinely interested in what might be coming out next!

However, I felt the narration needed trimming. It would have allowed the show to have flowed even more seamlessly and in some sections the dialogue could have benefitted from editing which could have lopped as much as 15 minutes off the total running time without diminishing (in any way) the quality of the overall production.

There were also parts of the dialogue which appeared to have been recited from memory (and prompt was heard on several occasions). I wasn't sure if the words were contained within the photo album - but bullet points would surely have sufficed as it certainly didn't need to be word perfect and probably a more ad-hoc and relaxed delivery might have worked better?

Memory was an appropriate and very solid song choice to start the show (sorry, I don't know names of performers so will refer to songs and sketches).

It was confidently delivered with staging kept simple. Definitely the 'less is more' mantra worked with this.

The Imaginary Friends sketch was excellent - nicely staged and very well acted. Well done.

We went up tempo with Like A Virgin which had nice energy but I wasn't sure it was a great song choice in the context of the whole show.

Invisible Man was again an excellent sketch -really well acted out and the minimal scenery perfect to convey being on the tube. I also liked the tube sound effect.

My only note on this sketch was that it was not totally dissimilar subject material from Imaginary Friends and could possibly have been placed further apart?

Plenty of energy in Tropicana - lively, liked the costumes and well sung.

Sign Language was brilliant - very funny and the audience loved it.

You Are My Destiny - excellent solo vocals.

ABC again a very good and amusing sketch well-acted.

Baggy Trousers made a brilliant ending for Act 1 with good choreography and bundles of energy. You clearly enjoyed performing the number and the audience loved it. (It's a song I know very well !!).

Act 2 started (very topically) with Eurovision and Shine The Light which made for a great start and delivered with strong vocals.

Adult Education was again very good (my comments for the sketches are repetitively 'very good' but they really were!!).

Lipstick On Your Collar was lively and again with good costuming.

Mastermind was an updated version of the Two Ronnies classic. Thought the lighting might have been a little more isolated in this scene to recreate the atmospheric conditions.

Generally though, both lighting and sound were excellent throughout the show - bearing in mind the limitations you are working with at the venue. Scene changes were also carried out efficiently and quietly!

We're In Heaven is a poignant song but I liked your interpretation which was strongly sung.

Synchronised swimming! Wow - really well done, the guys really excelled during this and I hope there weren't too many bruises. A real crowd winner - the audience loved it.

How Long Will I Love You - beautiful song and you certainly did it justice with great vocals. Just think in this number the dancers didn't really add anything (although performed well) and might have been better staged simply as a solo.

Bingo was a good final sketch. And not totally unbelievable in this politically correct world we are now in !!

There was a superb mega-mix finale which I really enjoyed and wanted more at the end (best way to leave the audience).

Dancing In The Street, Wake Up Little Susie, Great Balls Of Fire, Let's Dance, Twist Again - all classics well put across.

Take That (These Days) and a final blast of Baggy Trousers provided a perfect ending to a thoroughly entertaining evening.

The programme was nicely produced (colour too!) and I would like to state that me winning a box of Liquorice Allsorts in the raffle has had no impact on this review - impartial as I must be 😊

Many congratulations to all the production team headed up by Neil Edwards on his directorial debut. He greatly exceeded his ambition of 'bringing his ideas to life' and should be very proud of directing a great evenings entertainment.

Well done to you all and good luck for Alice In Wonderland in December.

David Stewart