

Talented new bunch of guys and dolls

Newbury Nomads: Guys and Dolls, at The Corn Exchange, from Wednesday, October 1 to Saturday, October 4

Gambling with public money was a risky business in 1993 when The Corn Exchange underwent its refurbishment. Newbury Nomads had the honour of presenting the first amateur show there 10 years ago so, following the venue's recent birthday celebrations, it was fitting that they kicked off the next 10 years with their latest production of **Guys and Dolls**. Already on a roll after the success of last year's **Oliver**, a full house saw them come up trumps again.

This musical fable of Broadway based on Damon Runyon's stories and peopled with colourful characters such as Harry the Horse, Benny Southstreet and Nicely-Nicely Johnson, has an illustrious history.

The original New York production ran for three years and spawned a film starring Marlon Brando, Jean Simmons and Frank Sinatra. I was privileged to watch rehearsals for a revival at the Royal National Theatre in London six years ago and I have a score signed by all the cast, including Imelda Staunton and Clarke Peters. The latter forgot his words during my favourite song *I've never been in love before* at the dress rehearsal, giving the lyrics *I thought I knew the score* and *I'm full of foolish song* a whole new meaning!

To their credit, Newbury Nomads are never afraid to welcome newcomers to their ranks and this production boasted an influx of youthful talent.

The ace in the pack was Jessica Ramsey as the adenoidal Miss Adelaide, lamenting the longest engagement in history to gambling promoter Nathan Detroit, played in his usual exemplary fashion by Nomads stalwart Stuart Honey. As Sky Masterson, pinstripe-suited Andrew Geater played it cool, if rather too aloof, as the guy who takes Mission Doll Sarah Brown to Havana for a bet only to end up falling in love with her.

Alana Ramsey showed promise as Sarah, the comedy numbers such as *If I were a bell* proving to be her salvation.

Jeanette Maskell directed with a sure hand and choreographed some excellent routines for the Hot Box dancers in particular.

The music zipped along under the baton of Nic Cope, ably assisted by Jevan Johnson Booth. The stage crew were kept busy changing an impressive set into the various locations required by the story. **Jesus Christ Superstar** is on the cards next year and, having upped the ante with the quality of this production, who could bet against another hit?

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