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Society : NOMADS MUSICAL THEATRE  
Production : **THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE**  
Date : 7<sup>th</sup> October 2017  
Venue : The Corn Exchange, Newbury  
Report by : Barrie Theobald

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## Show Report

After reviewing your production of 'Oklahoma!' last year, I was delighted to be invited to again report on your 2017 production.

The 1967 film 'Thoroughly Modern Millie' formed the basis of this stage musical. Musicals don't always transfer well to the stage but the theatrical creative team cleverly adapted the way-out storyline with new music, thereby creating the popular pastiche musical that opened on Broadway in 2002.

Most of the music is very up-beat, as befits the era in which it is set, with one or two tongue in cheek references back to earlier times, including snippets from *Ruddigore* and *Nutcracker* (and even a Chinese version of Al Jolson's *Mammy*).

**BETH MARSH** (Millie Dillmount) gave a delightful performance as the naive young lady from Kansas who arrived in New York determined to adopt the flapper vogue in her fashion whilst achieving a rich husband to boot. A very demanding role (on stage for much of the action) and one with a wide variety of music, I particularly enjoyed the contrast she displayed between her opening number *Not for the Life of Me* and her surer self in *Gimmie Gimmie*.

**GEORGE STACEY** (Jimmy Smith) from his first entry, George gave a very convincing portrayal. (The mocking pseudo Texan accent he attempted in that first scene immediately reminded me of that I heard him use in another US State last year!). His facial expressions added to his performance and they were particularly well used to show his frustration when Millie was proving difficult and in *What Do I Need With Love*.

This pair worked well together throughout the show.

**HANNAH MASKELL** (Miss Dorothy Brown) I felt that Hannah was a little hesitant at first, but she soon grew into the role as the piece progressed and cleverly under-played this comedy role. Although she had made early reference to her finances, she didn't have many costume changes. No doubt to deter any fortune hunter!

**TOM HAZELDEN** (Trevor Graydon) I admired the manner in which Tom maintained the 'no nonsense' suave side of his character until love struck following the appearance of Miss Dorothy. The clarity of the words came across perfectly in *Speed Test* and the varying tempi of the piece posed no problem.

The tongue-in-cheek humour between Miss Dorothy and Graydon was cleverly developed during *Ah! Sweet Mystery of Life/Falling in Love with Someone* and, in Tom's case, this continued in the finale when his disappointment at being dumped by Miss Dorothy for Ching Ho quickly changed after Bun Foo revealed his hidden secretarial talents!

**KATE LEEK** (Mrs. Meers) You were too nice to be a white slave trader, Kate! Whilst you were occasionally sharp with Ching Ho and Bun Foo, I didn't quite feel the sarcastic irony intended when repeating 'so sad to be all alone in the world'. At times I felt you really meant it! The pretend 'Chinese shuffle' action was carefully maintained when you were on stage with others.

**STUART HONEY (Bun Foo)** I have linked these two gentlemen as they usually  
**MATT COLLINS (Ching Ho)** appeared together, competently portraying the contrasting sides of their characters. *Mammy* is always a show stopper!

**ALISON HOULT** (Muzzy van Hossmere) Alison lit up the stage with her every entry. This was a superb portrayal of the rags to riches millionairess with a heart of gold. Her stage presence was excellent and her superb singing voice brought great quality to both her musical numbers. Congratulations.

**CHLOE ANDERSON** (Miss Flannery) A lovely portrayal of the typing pool supervisor with a heart of gold. I loved the hair style!

**AMY BILLINGTON** (Ruth) ]  
**ALICE KEEPING** (Gloria) ]  
**KAREN GRAHAM** (Rita) ] These ladies gave excellent support to the scenes set in the  
**ALICE BILLINGTON** (Alice) ] Hotel Priscilla and also sang and danced their way  
**ANNA NEARY** (Cora) ] through other scenes involving the whole chorus.  
**HOLLY LUCAS** (Lucille) ]  
**EMILY HUNT** (Ethel Peas) ]

**EMILY HUNT** also appeared alongside **ANABELLE BOWEY, SARAH HARRISON, PAM HONEY** and **JANE OLIVER** as toe tapping stenographers in the scenes at Sincere Trust Office for which Sarah devised the tap sequence.

The principals were well supported by the chorus in the general ensemble scenes and I was particularly impressed with the matching ‘tops and tights’ costumes some of the ladies wore in the Office scene.

The lighting plot designed by Lighting Director **MICHAEL BRENKLEY**, with follow spot controlled by **TOM WALKER** worked well, as did the sound monitored by the Corn Exchange technicians. I noticed only one late cue – it was a real delight for me to clearly hear most of the dialogue and singing. The projected translations of **JON LOVELL** and **DANIEL MASKELL** appeared on cue but did tend to draw the eye away from the action. Stage Manager **MIKE SCOTT-COUND** and his crew kept the pace of the show moving at the frenetic speed required. **CAROLE THROUP** and her assistant **ANN HARRIS** had sourced suitable 1920s costumes (even though the coloured tops/tights referred to above may have been a little on the theatrical licence side! I still liked that touch!!) and **AMANDA MASKELL, CAITLIN MASKELL** and **GAY BUCHANAN** provided props suitable to the era. **LOUISA MOORE, JENNA BAULCH** and **ZOE DWANE** supervised the makeup and **BEX DAY** and **AIDAN PRENTICE** were responsible for hair styling (some of which looked decidedly more modern). **TREVOR DOBSON** again designed an excellent programme. **RICHARD GEORGE** pulled all the strings together as the production developed.

Whilst the ‘tapping to move the lift’ scenes at Hotel Priscilla Lobby missed out somewhat because the illuminated floor lights above the lift that denote the lift’s movement were not working, overall the scenery adequately depicted the locations. The lovely stylised New York skyscrapers cast a shadow on the sky and some of the scenes were so brief that the black tabs had barely opened before they were closed again! Not your fault that the book includes many brief scenes.

When I saw the full orchestra pit I did wonder whether the sound from the stage would be overpowered by the upbeat jazzy music the show contains. My fears were unfounded and as I have already said, **NIC COPE (Musical Director)** skilfully balanced lyrics with the volume of his orchestra in all the musical numbers, both solos and ensembles. In this he was ably assisted by **JEVAN JOHNSON BOOTH** both at rehearsals and on keyboard in the pit.

With good blocking in the ensemble numbers and careful placing in the more intimate scenes and the assistance of **MELISSA HUGHES, JEANETTE MASKELL (Director)** is to be congratulated on presenting yet another fast, entertaining show that deftly captured the ambience of the era.

May I wish you all good luck for your future productions.

Best wishes,

*Barrie*

Hi Jet,

Sorry for the delay – have been experiencing all sorts of technical problems with the computer/printer (in the end had to buy a new printer!)

Never sure these days whether a short report goes direct to Rosemary or not or the format that it should take, so this may need re-editing please! Do we name names these days?

B.

X

7<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Newbury Nomads presented a lively production of this show revealing all the humour present in the improbable storyline. The 'flapper era' was competently represented on stage by the whole cast and the skilful combined control of the large orchestra and sound reproduction allowed the audience to clearly follow the plot whilst enjoying the up-beat, jazzy score - the music never overpowering the vocals.