

Musical rookies on a roll

Showtime gives less experienced actors the chance to perform
Nomads: Showtime Circus, at New Greenham Arts, from Thursday, March 26, to Saturday, March 28

You can't fault Nomads members for enthusiasm and the sight of more than 30 of the cast, all in colourful costumes and smiling, crammed on to the NGA stage for the opening number immediately put the audience in the right mood.

Showtime Circus is the latest in these annual concerts, which provide a good vehicle for giving members who need more experience a chance to prove themselves, along with the society's established stars.

The result was therefore a bit of a mix in this story of putting on a circus show. Highs there certainly were and the greatest applause of the evening went to Jon Lovell, as George the ventriloquist, singing *Nobody Without Me*, an original composition by Jamie Ledwith. Long ago, I remember a ventriloquist who made no attempt to disguise the fact that he was speaking for the doll winning a TV talent show. It was hilarious, and so was this very clever act.

Second winner of the night must go to the entire company singing *One Brick at a Time* from **Barnum**. Excellent singing and the slickness of the choreography as the bricks were tossed here and there was brilliant - what a lot of rehearsing to get that right.

Other stars included Sasha Robaczynski as the lion tamer with a reluctant lion (Duncan Sheldon), Matt Worth the not-very-good escapologist with the pleasant voice, Kath Burns as the feisty Connie and Colette Jones singing the wistful *Losing My Mind* from **Follies**.

More humour came from 'strong men' Shaun Blake and Neil Harvey in the enjoyable *Mostly Me*, a quintet of gorgeous brightly-coloured clowns announcing *Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens* and the wonderful Grace Ryder bringing out all the humour in *Macaroons* from **Acorn Antiques**.

Many songs were unfamiliar and not all deserved to be better known, but it made for an interesting evening with the accompaniment to the action expertly provided by musical director Jevan Johnson Booth, Nic Cope and Luke Wyeth.

The finale came with *Freak Flag* from **Shrek the Musical** and the stage filled and overflowed with vibrant enjoyment as writer, director and choreographer Holly Lucas's story came to an end.

Showtime Circus had achieved its aims, the audience enjoyed it. What more can you want?

CAROLINE FRANKLIN