

Yee-haw!

Nomads cast and crew stage a humdinger of a show

Nomads: Oklahoma!, at the Corn Exchange, from Wednesday, October 5, to Saturday, October 8

Oklahoma! was Rodgers and Hammerstein's first collaboration. Although there were doubts as to whether the pairing would succeed, these ended as the musical hit the stage and this all-time favourite was guaranteed to be popular when Nomads chose it to celebrate their 40th anniversary.

Often in reviews, the orchestra comes in for a late mention. I'm putting the musicians up front. Led by musical director Nic Cope, their playing, particularly of the overture, was a superb sound-setter for what was to follow.

The curtains opened on Aunt Eller (Alison Hault giving an excellent performance) and soon the rich, strong voice of Jon Lovell, as lovelorn Curly, was celebrating a 'beautiful morning' and promising the beautiful Laurey (Sasha Robaczynski) a ride in that surrey with the fringe on top if she would go to the picnic with him.

She refuses, agreeing to accompany the unpleasant Jud Fry (gorgeously deep-voiced Russell Barrett). Meanwhile, we have met flirty Ado Annie (Fern Barthorpe) and her suitors, Ali Hakim (Neil Harvey, an entertainingly slippery peddler) and the impecunious Will Parker (George Stacey). George is an actor who lights up the stage; his 'Kansas' song and dance with the men was a highlight of this show.

Fern had both the voice and acting skills to capture the daffy Annie exactly in a first-class performance. In contrast, the dialogue in the scene between Jon Lovell and Russell Barrett in Jud's dilapidated home was cleverly menacing, while Jon and Sasha's duet, the evocative *People Will Say We're in Love*, was gently and musically charming.

Two big numbers – *The Farmer and the Cowhand* and *Oklahoma!* must have been an enormous undertaking for choreographer Sasha Robaczynski and one which she achieved tremendously well. With approximately 30 members in the women's chorus alone, an immense amount of rehearsal must have been necessary to reach this high standard of singing and slickness of action from the large cast. I felt the audience were waiting for a final chorus of *Oklahoma!* to end the show, but it didn't happen.

There were excellent actors in smaller parts, among them dancers Tom Hazelden and Annabelle Bowey in the dream sequence, father and daughter Daniel and Hannah Maskell as Annie's dad, and Gertie with that awful laugh, as well as dancers and cowboys, Andy Pocock, James Pascall-Smith and Tony Randall.

The difficulties of having such a large chorus were well overcome and director Jeanette Maskell and her team are to be congratulated.

CAROLINE FRANKLIN