

Oh! What A Lovely War

Since joining Thame Players more than thirty-five years ago, I have watched and been in, some wonderful productions and some not so wonderful, some financially successful, others not so much. Watching Steve Lambell's production of 'Oh! What A Lovely War', last week I decided that it definitely belonged in the *wonderful production* category if not lacking just a little pace in parts.

If a person watches anything live in a theatre and then finds themselves singing the songs and going over certain scenes in their mind for some days afterwards, that surely means the production must have made an impact. Oh! sure, there were a few 'moments' shall we say, some members of the of the cast were stronger than others - but that is only to be expected in a piece which has a cast of thousands, (sic), and starts off being a complex entertainment to stage in the first place.

The director, the crew, the technical team - all of the backroom personnel and not least of all the cast, made one hell of a fist of Joan Littlewood's vision of the pathos, humour and futility that came with the 'Great War', the war to end all wars - we were told!

This isn't an easy Musical Entertainment to stage. With numerous entrances and exits, a massive number of costume changes, the same actors playing different parts, alarming sound effects, a complicated lighting plot and an intricate back projection storyboard, all of these pitfalls could have conspired to spell out a disastrous night at The Players Theatre in Thame.

Instead, on the night I attended it seemed a seamless production. With the ringmaster, Tony Long weaving a thread through the narrative, keeping us informed as it were, (as well as following his calling as a believable Padre), with such wonderful vignettes being portrayed by accomplished actors like Bernadette Tildesley and Colleen Tudway, the sombre mood and high humour portrayed by soldiers Adam Hurst, Steve Batchelor, Josh Rush and John Fowler. The solo numbers projected confidently by Lucy Hardy, Juliet Kendall, Nicky Rochford, Julia Rush and John Poole. The adept tinkling of the ivories by Steve Bannister as Musical Director - all combined to make this a suitable testament to the Centenary Anniversary of the First World War. Added to this, who can forget the hilarious drill sergeant scene? A virtuoso performance by Andy Dale, the staring eyes and awesome presence of Adrian Vickers' Field Marshall Lord Haig, the tongue twisting rendition given by the 'Ladies' of 'Sister Susie Sowing Shirts.....' lead by Carolyn Ross and the unforgettably haunting offering of Tom Mackriell's 'When This Lousy War Is Over'?

Other names to be Mentioned In Dispatches and who more than ably supported their colleagues on the battlefield are Niamh Blane, Jane Burke, Janet Erskine, Gill Quartly and Charlotte Schuman, Oh! oh! oh! what A Lovely War - indeed!

Brian Holt