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The Wedding Singer

Book by Chad Beguelin and Tim Herlihy

Music by Matthew Sklar and Lyrics by Chad Beguelin

Performed by CREDITON OPERATIC and Dramatic Society

On Friday 12th April 2024 at QE Lower School, Barnfield, Crediton

Directed by Heather Barlow

Musical Director - Alan Fouracre

Choreographer – Daisy Dafters assisted by Michelle Glover

What an entrance, not me but the foyer entrance of the Queen Elisabeth School which had been turned into a wedding reception/bridal fayre by Michelle Glover, her team with the free support and assistance of a local wedding fayre company called 'Unique Designs'. Stunning white blossoming trees, a top table decorated with a wedding cake and flowers, a beautifully created flower wall, it felt and looked wonderful. You certainly knew what show you were coming to see and it did not end there. I was greeted by the lovely front of house team as I entered the auditorium (originally the school hall) who were assisting us to our seats having checked the 'seating plan', created as if we were the actual guests at a wedding. This continued as a theme as, when I sat down, I took in the incredible stage décor which was also ingeniously created by Craig Phoenix and Gillian Mackenzie. Set with two raised stage areas, right and left at the rear of the performance area, stage right contained the band and stage left, the drummer behind clear screens and an area for the Wedding Band to perform. In front of these were four round tables with red and gold chairs surrounding, set as a wedding reception and a beautifully painted floor of mosaic like squares in muted pinks and blues. Julia's bedroom verandah and house was positioned stage right with the reception bar area set opposite. Huge white drapes and sash bow framed the central rear entrance to the stage and blacks were used to separate scenes front of tabs and to assist changes.

Having never seen the film of the same name or the musical it is based on before, I had no idea what a treat I was in for and from the minute the Wedding Band began to play 'It's Your Wedding Day' and the actor playing Robbie started singing, you knew it was going to be a rollercoaster of a ride.

This is a complicated love story set in the 1980's and hilariously told through a great script and wonderful musical numbers. Robbie lives with his grandma, Rosie who I will talk about later. Robbie Hart is a well-known wedding singer and I suppose the actor playing him had a slight advantage as his real life occupation is that of a wedding singer with 'All Jazzed Up and 'Pocketful of Groove'. However, he played this part brilliantly. His comedy timing and natural charisma was perfect and the audience warmed to him immediately. His acting was natural and totally believable. He had us in stitches throughout, on his vibrating bed, or when, whilst waiting at the altar he is dumped via letter by his fiancé, Linda, refusing to come out of a dumpster and when he was 'Drunk Mc-wasted' (I think that was the terminology). I loved this performance and could have watched it again as I was crying with laughter along with the rest of the audience. Supported well by the rest of his band members being Sammy and George, this trio worked well together. Sammy with his 'trying to be cool' all the time and George, a young actor with very funny one-liners.

Linda, Robbie's fiancé, was uproarious throughout and huge congrats to the actor who gave us this character. We first meet her singing 'A note' to Robbie aside stage, dressed in an incredibly provocative wedding costume and blonde wig and then when she performs 'Let Me Come Home' whilst trying to seduce and persuade Robbie to take her back, again in an even more daring black bodice and underwear. With a strong voice and gut-busting hilarity this was great fun to watch. Robbie's grandma, Rosie, has some of the best one-liners in the show. Expertly brought to life by this actor (and current President of CODS) especially when she sings 'A Note from Grandma' which had the audience guffawing with laughter.

We then meet Julia Sullivan, a waitress and our heroine, who is about to marry Glen Goolia (I know, Julia Goolia!). Glen is a cocky stockbroker type but really a philanderer, ogling other women whenever he has the opportunity. Glen was played well by an actor with great stage presence and who also played the hilarious bum on the bar stool. Julia was brought to life by a hum dinger of an actor and was just delightful in the role from start to finish. Portraying a sweet, kind waitress she meets Robbie at various weddings, is attracted to him but knows she is engaged to Glen. With a delightful voice, natural, convincing and plausible, I was enthralled with this performance

and it being her first lead role with CODS too. The relationship between her and Robbie was believable, as was her friendship with her fellow waitress, Holly. With a casual New York accent, Holly acted, sang and danced well throughout. I loved her being less than polite to Sammy as he tries to win her back.

Mentioning dance at this point, I have to say the choreography produced by the company and dancers was cleverly worked especially in 'It's Not That Kind of Thing' in the shopping mall and 'All About the Green' in the office scene. Daisy Dafters choreography throughout was pretty exceptional and refreshing, performed with energy and enthusiasm by the whole cast.

The leading roles were well supported by the other actors such as the actor playing Angie, Julia's mum and Mookie/Shane and the huge ensemble, some who swapped characters, roles and costumes numerous times during the performance. I particularly liked the fake Elvis, Imelda Marcos, Tina Turner etc.

Leila Watson and her team provided the cast with realistic 80's attire especially the rainbow-coloured array of ballgowns, those gorgeous green bridesmaid dresses at the beginning (I know as had one just like it) 80's wedding dresses, suits for the office workers, George's outfit and wig, the sequined jackets, the leggings, crop tops and head bands in the disco. Great job sourcing all of those and more. It brought the 80's and the production to life.

To be seen and heard on stage we rely on that company of specialists, the lighting and sound operators to do a good job. They did not disappoint. The three spots on Rosie, Robbie and Julia in '50 Years/If I Told You', the bright oranges and yellows used during The Shopping Mall, actors 'spotted' during the dumpster scene, front of tabs. It cannot be easy to produce good lighting in a school hall but the use of the lighting cube placed above the stage gives the lighting desk the ability to adapt and it works well. The orchestra was at just the right level allowing the actors to be heard especially during underscored dialogue, along with the punchy sound of The Wedding band. Personal mics can sometimes feedback and those not mic-ed can also not be heard but I did not feel this was the case here. The stage crew, dressed as waiting staff had a job moving the vibrating bed but did it with ease and the front of house team worked their magic too with a great bar at this wedding!

The cast enjoyed being part of such an exhilarating and upbeat musical and it showed quite clearly in both their faces and their performances. It was a great night of entertainment and one I could have watched again and again. Huge congratulations to the talented cast of The Wedding Singer and to CODS for a great production.

Lyn Burgoyne - Noda Representative (District 5, Mid and East Devon)