

Betty Blue Eyes - WAOS, Witham

Guest Reviewer: Christine Davidson, 31st April

Having seen this musical a few years ago I was, at that time, really not impressed, so it was with great joy that this time around I saw a really fresh, joyous, funny musical with a huge, enthusiastic cast, who gave us a wonderful evening of entertainment.

The NODA award winning director Clare Carr gave us a really excellent, well thought out production. With an open setting, using set pieces for the scene changes, the show never flagged and even when there were large changes by the cast themselves, they were well drilled and controlled so that it all seemed seamless. Musical Director Susannah Edom and her orchestra enhanced the show with the bright tunes which summed up the period, never overshadowing the singers on the stage.

Set in Shepardsford Yorkshire in 1947, where the villagers continue to have food rationing following the end of the war, the only thing for them to look forward to is the impending marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Prince Philip. A lavish banquet is organised and they are hiding a pig, Betty Blue Eyes, named after the Princess.

Hero of the show was the downtrodden chiropodist, Gilbert Chilvers, played by Matt Bacon. He showed us the kind gentle man he was with a terrific singing voice. His strident dominant wife Joyce, was played with powerful conviction by Aimee Hart. What a pairing this was. A true delight to see the pair of them, work so well with each other. I loved the scene too where she sang 'Nobody' with the fantastic ensemble and was changed behind the feathered fans, into an evening dress.

Singing Magic Fingers were the trio were Mrs Roach, Mrs Turnball and Mrs Lester. (Amy Pryce, Tracy Hackett and Megan Abbott) This was beautifully portrayed with lovely harmonies.

The fabulous conniving trio of Dr James Swaby, Henry Allardyce and Francis Lockwood (Stewart Atkins, David Slater and Dannii Carr) were so much fun on stage. The three singing 'A Private Function' was truly special; while Allardyce and Gilbert sang 'Betty Blue Eyes' with such love for the pig.. Well done gentlemen for bringing such humour to the show. As for the toilet scene, this was very English humour and had the audience in stitches.

Mother Dear (Fiona Bocking) was delightful; she played the role with excellent humour and a very funny performance which all of the audience loved. Good facial expressions and body language, this was truly a role for a mature performer to grab.

The villain of the piece is Inspector Wormold (Ian Gilbert) Dressed in a long black leather coat and black hat, typical of the Gestapo. He was wonderfully over the top and played the role as a pantomime villain to perfection, with excellent stage presence. Entering in green light and taking great glee painting the meat green so it could not be eaten, he commanded the stage. I felt like booing him every time he entered.

Betty Blue Eyes was obviously the star of the show and was operated well by Alice Mason. The trick when you operate a puppet is not to look at the audience but to become one with the creature. This she did and I totally believed in Betty on stage.

There were so many wonderful performances by the huge cast and as usual WAOS has true talent and gives us superb shows. Costumes, wigs, make up were appropriate to the late 40's early 50's and had been obviously well researched by the production team. Lighting was imaginative and sound quality good.

This was a super show, excellently directed by Claire and her assistant Emma Loring which brought laughter and happiness to the audience, who left the theatre having loved every moment. Huge congratulations to all.