

Braintree & Witham Times Review

FOLLIES

The audience needs to be on its toes to work out what's going on in Stephen Sondheim's Follies. Who belongs to whom, who did belong to whom, who's who now and who was who? The plot revolves around two couples meeting up after some time and finding the flame still burns between the husband of one and the wife of the other who had been together 30 years before.

The couples' alter egos from that time share the stage with them, with subtle lighting changes moving the spotlight from one to the other. They duet with each other and with their earlier selves, and at one point 1970s man dances with 1940s girl. The mix is deftly handled by director/choreographer Nikki Mundell-Poole and musical director Jill Parkin, with strong performances in the four lead roles from David Slater, Pauline Roast, Nicholas Clough and Liz Watson.

Will Ashbey, Shelly Fisher, Philip Mennell and Holly Wendes shine too as their younger versions, with Holly. in particularly leaping out of character in a delightful dance routine towards the end.

Sondheim clearly had in mind a large company when he wrote this as he cleverly gives over the stage for a number of solo performances, giving Judy Fishwick – a particularly enchanting "Ah Paris" – Cynthia Stead, Anne Wilson, Janet Wash, Pat Briggs and Lucy Taylor a chance to shine.

The show is not Sondheim's most accessible and lacks familiar or rousing tunes for the audience to hum along to. The score itself is also a difficult one to master, so congratulations are due to all the singers for getting their voices round it. What it lacks in readymade tunes, it makes up for in glamour. The costumes are dazzling and the changes quick and fast, making movement behind the scenes, one suspects, even more frenetic than on stage.

Review by Ron Fosker