

British Theatre Guide

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Guys and Dolls

Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows, based on a story and characters of Damon Runyon, music and lyrics by Frank Loesser

Guildford School of Acting

Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford

20–25 February 2017

Guildford School of Acting students always impress with their talent, dedication and enthusiasm, all very evident in this ebullient production, a collaboration between director Samuel Wood and themselves.

They begin on Broadway, a scene so crowded and so busy that if you said there were around five hundred people on stage I would not have been surprised. Every one is a character with a part to play from “blind” pickpocket to policeman and all others in between.

They seem to have decided to play up the comedy element of the “low life” characters rather too much for my taste and I wanted to say “calm down, slow down and don’t overemphasise”, but reviewing is very subjective and this might be perfection to others. Laurie Denman seems to have modelled his Nathan Detroit on Groucho Marx and I preferred it when he settled down to more verbal comedy, although I had to laugh at Samuel Wyn-Morris’s neat, tip-toe, delicate bourrée in his dice throwing preparation as Big Jule, so totally at odds with his big rough, tough, menacing character.

The serious love interest in the show is provided by Jessi Elwood and Evan Sutton when Sarah Brown, the very religious leader of the Salvation Army Mission, meets Sky Masterson, the itinerant gambler. They have the most beautiful songs—“I’ll Know” and “I’ve Never been in Love Before”—while on the other side of the coin we find Miss Adelaide and Nathan who have been engaged for fourteen years. Their songs are more of an argument with Adelaide trying unsuccessfully to pin Nathan down to a wedding date—the song “Sue Me” is relevant.

Adelaide is a real gem of a part and Mari McGinlay relishes every moment. The wistful, yet very comical, “Adelaide’s Lament” is emphasised and enhanced by some beautifully arranged orchestration, exquisitely timed, and she is very funny in her fast-talking altercations with her fiancé, but she can also do pathos and a defeated dejection enough to make you cry.

Song and dance numbers are excellent. The showstopping “Sit Down You’re rockin’ the Boat” is a particular highlight, sung and danced superbly by Jed Berry as Nicely-Nicely but involving the whole company and most of the furniture in a brilliant and very inventive choreographed and stage-managed sequence. On that theme, the scene changes are also so slick and speedy, again almost all by the cast, that you’re from a Mission Hall in New York to a nightclub in Havana before you can blink.

Aside from the four principals, this is very much an ensemble production with everyone playing their part in pulling the whole show together, and Runyan’s story is clearly and imaginatively told

with his humour firmly intact, all so involving and entertaining, and a testimony to the quality of the production, that it was a total surprise to find three hours had passed.

Reviewer: [Sheila Connor](#)