

**South West Regional Councillor: Nick Lawrence**

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*noda*

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**REPORT FOR:- “City of Angels” music by Cy Coleman, Lyrics by David Zippel,  
Book by Larry Gelbart TAOS Musical Theatre  
Performance: Arc Theatre, Trowbridge Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2015  
Reviewed by: Nick Lawrence, Regional Councillor standing in for Regional Rep. Petra Schofield**

*Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what he sees at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance and it is inevitable that his assessment will be affected by that knowledge.*

*The N.O.D.A. Representative’s intention is to give an objective critique of the overall production and in particular the performance viewed. It should be remembered that any review of this nature can only be objective as far as the techniques used during the performance observed. Any criticisms expressed may not have been valid at other performances, and are only made to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.*

*It is hoped that the audience’s appreciation of your efforts will have given everyone a lift and encouraged you to greater achievements in the future and that the observations made by the reviewer will prove helpful in improving future productions*

From the exciting opening from the band and the Angel City Four it was clear that there was to be no flinching from the challenge of this rarely performed show. The script and score demand an energetic and punchy presentation and TAOS Musical Theatre certainly gave it that.

The constant movement between the real and celluloid worlds can be very confusing, but every effort had been made to make the differences clear. Congratulations must go to the wardrobe department which was central to providing clarity. Along with artful lighting and projected scene settings the real world was colourful, but not overly so, and the movie firmly in “black & white” as expected of this genre of film. The Philip Marlow voiceover was read with the appropriately grainy voice and operated with some subtlety.

In the central roles of Stine & Stone, Sean Andrews and Sam Stevens grew more alike as matters came to a head. There were some nice exchanges of mannerism and posture. Good work between actors and director to build interesting relationships/

The many and various scenes were effectively created with the simplest of additions to the composite setting. The door was a particular favourite. Some of the changes seemed lengthy. Perhaps the choreography of these changes, obviously thought out, could have included some cast members so that they became part of the filming process, or would this have added another possible confusion for the first time members of the audience? Erring on the side of caution probably ensured that there were no obvious disasters. It is always difficult when the composer only allowed a few bars for a change

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**National Operatic and Dramatic Association**

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[obviously set changes can be worked quicker on complicated revolving sets] as the obvious repeating of a short phrase does give a clue to how long everything is taking. The shadowy figures executing the changes were very much in keeping with the mystery of the piece.

Although Stine/Stone is the central character the roles making most impact are the girls. There were some extremely feisty portrayals here along with some powerful performances of the wonderful songs. My personal favourite "With Every Breath" was marvellously presented without unnecessary movement. In fact, in this area the girls all scored so highly, using their excellent voices and internalised emotions to carry the songs without resorting to "acting" or extraneous dancing. The contrast in voices between the shared characters was particularly successful with Oolie/Donna's following solos. Gabby held the audience in her soliloquy and there was an innocent clarity from Mallory.

The performance of the score was not just a success for the girls. The fellas equalled them with Jimmy Powers vocal insecurities beautifully portrayed. Not being prepared for the joke, I thought "he's not going to get far with this song" only for him to break down – deliberately I discovered.

The violence, so essential to the plot, was very well handled. Keeping the old fashioned detective story style of the piece, it had a touch of the comic picture about it. It only lacked the "pow" and "thwack!" signs. I'm glad you didn't.

What was particularly pleasing was the way the comedy had been brought out. In fact, I was surprised how much comedy there was. Some of it was too American for the audience to grasp, but with the clarity of diction from all the players the many nuances were easily gained and there was a good deal of chuckling going on. The slight naughtiness of the movie was also brought out. We are all familiar with some of the lesser scary detective movies of the 30's and 40's.

The show has very little call for company scenes, but does have a continuous stream of small roles – each vital in its own way. The strength of the company was shown in how well all these were portrayed as well as the crowd scenes. With the limited space the Arc offers the logistics were well handled without sign of effort. Entrances and exits flowed naturally [even the unco-operative chaise] with characters being well maintained.

The director met all the challenges most effectively. The story seemed easier to follow than on previous occasions. There was some interesting dialogue between characters especially in the real world while in the movie everything had a "performed" look about it. Particularly impressive was the clarity of the dialogue. Despite the American accents no one mumbled and every effort was made to help the audience follow what could be a very complicated evening. The department of the various characters and their stereo-typical manners were beautifully expressed without a sign of effort.

Of course, as a musical this relies on the contribution of the band to create the right atmosphere and the style of the piece. The players in their own little area at the side of the action worked well together. The Direction was clear and confident allowing the underscoring and introductions to be smoothly

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assimilated into the whole. There were some impressive solo passages particularly from the saxophones which appropriately leading the way. The quality of the musical contribution added greatly to the success of the presentation.

It is most commendable that a company should present one of the lesser known musicals, giving the audience a chance to get to know this wonderful show. The company met the challenge full on while the production team creatively dealt with the complicated requirements. This was an enjoyable evening which maintained the Society's high standards.

Nick Lawrence

12<sup>th</sup> December 2015

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