



## ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

**Name of Society:** TAOS MUSICAL THEATRE

**Name of Production:** 'CITY OF ANGELS'

**Date:** 25 November 2015

**Venue:** Arc Theatre, Trowbridge

**Adjudicator:** Clare Toghill

**PRESENTATION/ SETTING – DESIGN AND DÉCOR:** The set was a dark, blank canvas upon which the suggestions of various scenes could be set; for example, a simple desk and typewriter became Stine's office and a beautiful, black velvet chaise long represented the plush interior of a stately home. A raised apron ran across the back width of the stage, complete with steps and this added another level, useful particularly for the many exits and entrances. A projector screen was suspended on the back curtain and this added visual clues as to the location of each scene. The 9-strong band and conductor were situated to the left of the stage and on the same level as the action. It was fantastic to be able to see the orchestra in action. The lights from their stands did not detract from the action on stage and if anything the subtle, twinkling lights made them look a little magical.

**LIGHTING:** Tony Giddings: The lighting for this show was excellent. The general cover was good and there were no unsightly shadows. The special effects were complex and the numerous cues were all executed in a timely and professional manner. The projected images were varied and created the desired effect on stage, in addition to aiding the audiences' knowledge of each scene's whereabouts; for example, images of flats,

'Hollywood land', a jail, an office door were lit up on the back curtain. The script requires that the screenplay plot is as monochrome as possible. The bright, white lighting certainly enhanced this and the Film Noir look was definitely achieved. To represent warmer climes, a soft straw light bathed the stage. The blackouts were swiftly achieved. Red lighting was employed at times to highlight reverse action was taking place, as we were effectively inside Stine's writing head. This was extremely effective. Overall, it can be said that this department can feel very satisfied with their input here; very well done.

**SOUND AND EFFECTS:** Ian Fisher for 'Sum and Difference': The sound levels were spot on. The music was loud and rousing. The speaking voices and vocals were all superbly balanced. The sound effects were numerous; particularly of ringing phones, with the exception of one small error, these were all superbly timed and executed. The many spoken voice-overs were played at a slightly higher level and this was very effective. The exaggerated taps and clicks from the typewriter as Stine furiously typed were very good. Car horns sounded out well. The sound of thunder in Act 2, was pleasingly atmospheric. Well done to this department.

**PROPS:** Christina Barnes, Members and friends of the society: The Wardrobe Mistress in the final scene wore a wristband of pins had a tape measure around her neck. The Make-up artists had the full kit in portable boxes of the era. The wireless was an authentic prop and it even lit up when in use. The kit for the barber was correct. The tall, boxed Microphone on the stand in the Blue Note was also authentic-looking. The Iron Lung was life-sized, effective and it was cleverly stored away from the auditorium and wheeled on past the audience with minimal fuss – I expect that it took a few rehearsals to get this bit right! The upper casing of the lung was easily removed for the inhabitant to get in and out of it. The public call box stand was great.

**COSTUME:** Joan Baggs, Sandra Tucker, Michelle Hole and hired costumes from Bath Theatrical Costumiers: It is pleasing to note that there was a mix of hired and sourced/made costumes. The production was beautifully dressed and the era of 1940's Los Angeles was perfectly brought to life. The 'blood' on the Technician's lab coat could have appeared 'fresher' or more realistic. Slim-cut dresses, silky, luxurious fabrics, sharp suits, immaculate accessorising, made this an opulently visual feast. Tank tops, slacks, pearls, clutch bags, satin shoes, Trilby hats, Mary-Jane shoes, highly-polished brogues, bow-ties, long evening gloves, tennis whites, a 'Nehru' jacket, palazzo pants....It was a highly styled and very attractive production. Well done.

**HAIR & MAKE UP:** Kate Millard Starkey, students from Wiltshire College, Wigs: Peggy Snook: The hair and wigs were perfect for this era. Hair was rolled (top reverse rolls) and waved and pinned into place; the cast looked glamorous and immaculate. The wigs used to suggest the fictional characters were mostly hair pieces and extensions and these were used to great effect. The ladies wore make-up you would expect from the era; flawless matt

foundation (heavy coverage), defined eyebrows, the film-noir look of cat-eye eye-liner, smoky eyes and a slash of red lipstick.

**STAGE MANAGEMENT:** Ollie Phipps and Emma Elliott: My word, what a slick production! This is a truly challenging and complex piece of theatre with the numerous cues, location changes and character-swaps; it could leave a lesser company in a bit of a spin. Not so for TAOS. This production used levels, split-screens, coded lighting, voice-overs and pre-recorded sections – all to great effect.

**MUSIC/ORCHESTRA/MUSICAL DIRECTION:** Helen Heaton: The orchestra was outstanding. The music they created together was rousing and uplifting. It was a 9-strong band, consisting of a piano, percussion, Reeds, trumpets, bass and a trombone. The Orchestra worked beautifully alongside the actors and the technicians of this production. Super work.

**DIRECTION:** Andrew Curtis: The fading in and out of voices, the use of voiceovers and gesticulation, whilst characters soliloquised was super. This is a technically demanding show and the playwright's intention was fully realised here, on stage in Trowbridge. The re-winding of sections of the story was easily brought to life under a red glow and these were perfectly timed. The split-screen worked well and the use of the projected images behind enhanced the audiences' understanding of the complex plot. Why in Act 2, did the singers venture up to the balcony, do nothing and then depart again in the dark? There seemed no reason to do this. The physical theatre and street-fight scenes were deftly executed. The tableaux of the Ensemble at the party worked brilliantly, although their eye lines were somewhat mismatched here, during the action before and after this moment. Stone's escape scene was very well played-out. This was a brave choice of show to direct and TAOS, under your guidance, pulled it off. Congratulations.

**SINGING:** Helen Heaton: 'What You Don't Know About Women', was fabulous. We wanted to hear each and every word these girls had to say on the subject – and we did. There was a depth of feeling here. Their simultaneous head nods brought this number to a pleasing end. 'The Buddy System' was rousing and catchy and purely entertaining. The Ensemble looked up and out at the audience. 'Everybody's Gotta Be Somewhere' was a weaker number; the solos here weren't strong and the timing was out, although there was some pleasing stage business going on with members of the Ensemble and the pictures they made with their street-scene groupings were good. 'All You Have to do is Wait', was well-performed. 'You're Nothing Without Me' was fantastic; two finely matched voices battled it out before us, with utter conviction. There was a fabulous 'Big Band' sound to accompany this. 'Stay with Me' gave us some lovely harmonies. 'With Every Breath I take', sang by Bobbi, Stone and Stine, was a superb number, possibly the most reminiscent of the Film Noir Genre in the production; it was glamorous, tragic, stylised and authentic. 'Funny' was powerful and moving.

**MOVEMENT AND DANCE:** Sarah Hanks: There were no large-scale dance routines in this show; rather there were more intimate groupings of movement to accompany the songs. As previously mentioned, the stage-fighting was superb. Also worth mentioning are the very neat endings as each ensemble number came to a close. This may seem like a small point, but it really makes a difference to see musical and choral numbers neatly finished; with extended eye lines and strong positions held. Well done. The movement in, 'All You Have to do is Wait' was exotic and fun, although it felt at this point as the show had started to unravel ... nothing to do with TAOS, simply that the script had started to run away with itself a little and that it was time for the Interval! Overall, the movement was slick and reminiscent of the period.

**PRODUCTION: Show Co-ordinator:** Matt Heaton: This is not a production for the faint-hearted. The technical precision this show requires is extensive and unrelenting. It is a weighty show that requires much of both its cast and its crew. Co-ordinating this production must have required a huge amount of planning and it certainly paid off here. Well done.

#### **THE CAST:**

**Stine: Sean Andrews:** This was a memorable performance. He was dour, fed-up, self-absorbed and utterly convincing. We wanted to see him succeed. This was truthful acting; subtle and yet full of passion for his cause. His singing voice was fabulous and he articulately belted out the tricky score with great ease. His eye-lines were spot-on; this was a fully-rounded and believable characterisation of quite a complex character.

**Stone: Sam Stevens:** There were so many great lines of dialogue; slow down at times to let the audience digest what you are saying. This was a physically pleasing performance with lots of gesture and intention. His song about needing the 'dough' was great and the high notes were effortlessly achieved. His answer to Mallory's question regarding the number of lost people he has found in his bed was great, "So far? Just me".

**Gabby/Bobbi: Leonie Macaslin:** Gabby's frustration was superbly brought to the surface in this sensitively portrayed characterisation. This was truthful acting and she engaged the audience immediately. Leonie brought the dialogue to life for us, "When are you gonna like yourself a little more so you can stand for people to like you a little less?" What a great line! 'Every Breath I Take' was beautifully performed and as a result, was very alluring. This was another mature and intelligent performance. The tussle with Stone and Irvine was neat and effective. Gabby's song, 'It Needs Work' was bouncy and vitriolic. Her anger was tangible, but never overly-exaggerated; this was convincing.

**Donna/Oolie: Michelle Hole:** This actor possesses a lovely, rich vocal tone, which lent all of her dialogue warmth and sincerity. Donna was a grounded and warm characterisation. Oolie's song, 'You Can Always Count on Me' was stunning. There was a real depth of feeling

here as she opened up about her repeated failings with men. Her switch into Donna was quick and professionally realised. The dialogue between Donna and Stine was witty and fast-paced. Here she was sassy and captivating. This performer has a very natural, watchable quality.

**Buddy Fidler/Irwing S Irving: Paul West:** Here we had a very capable actor whose American accent was spot-on. His singing into the phone as his shoes were being shined was entertaining and we hung off his every word. He was always neat, soave and completely self-absorbed; this was a superb characterisation. He danced and lightly pushed Stine around his office with elegance and charisma. The delivery of his dialogue was relaxed and authoritative; we were in very safe hands here. His huge enigmatic gestures were very fitting in, 'The Buddy System'. This was a very watchable performance (both characters); slick and professional.

**Carla Haywood/Alaura Kingsley: Lesley Windsor:** Alaura's first entrance was captivating as she sashayed into the space to the slinky music. She was demanding, poised and articulate. She sang with clear diction and intent. Her voice suited the lower range of this score. Her first exit, "Good day." was every inch as exciting as her first entrance. This was a compelling performance in all. In her immaculate tennis whites, she was even more imperturbable and unfaltering in her attitude, as the young Peter gingerly massaged her knee. The musical number here was superb; full of innuendo and fun. In Act Two, as Carla Haywood, she was equally stylish in her feminine bathrobe and the natural delivery of her dialogue with Buddy was pleasing.

**Avril Raines/Mallory Kingsley: Lydia Stevens:** 'Lost and Found' was a sultry low-noted affair and it was executed in a super voice-breathy but powerful. This number was performed in profile for the best part, so she could have looked up and out a little more, saying that, it was a lovely number overall. Avril was a smashing starlet.

**Pancho Vargas/ Lieutenant Munoz: Simon Chown:** Munoz, "...You're not going to need a scarf at night, not with my breath on your neck." This was menacing and witty. We fully believed him! His song was fun and full of quirky, overblown gestures. He was fully committed to this number. At times, the accent was a little inconsistent, but this didn't seem to worry the audience one bit. This was a very physical performance.

**Jimmy Powers: Michael Adams:** He looked every inch the part in his smart, tartan jacket. His earring reference was perfectly timed.

**Gilbert/Mandrill: Mike Holden:** Mandril was a composed figure of authority, as a spiritual therapist. He stood fast and was able to clearly demonstrate his passion for meditation and the like.

**Officer Pasco/Del Dacosta: Ed Byrne:** Officer Pasco embodied this role, standing with legs apart and hands behind his back. Del was flamboyant and eccentric.

**Gerald/Peter Kingsley/Photographer: Ryan Chown:** Peter was quick on his feet and subservient to his overbearing Stepmother. He was sincere and eccentric.

**Big Six: Phil Greenaway and Sonny: Andrew Curtis:** The Heavies entered by literally pushing down a door. This was fantastic. There followed some super physical theatre / fighting moves, (punches to stomachs) as they 'busted up' Stone in mime, behind the Angel City Four singing on the radio. This was a very powerful moment.

**Angel City Four: Caroline Murray, Sarah Hanks, Jon Paget, Claire Borovac:** Well done to this quartet; the harmonies were challenging and they did a fantastic job. They moved about the space as a unit and their almost prophetic delivery was pleasing. A small note: when in a group like this, decide on your unified delivery; if you are all going to remain serious or smile up and out. There were different approaches here. The finger-clicking was rhythmic and strong and their entertainment value was high. A good deal of work done here. Well done.

**Ensemble: Andrew Curtis, Pete Grant, Helen Cosslett, Maria Matthews, Wendy Wenham, Alison Chown, Ann Berry, M'lou Llewellyn, Janet Thompson, Denise Harrison, Clive James:**The Elderly Shoe-Shine Boy did a great job and was completely focused on his task. The Maid's lack of expression provided some light relief as she performed her duties. Margie was confident and domineering. The Masseuse looked the part in a smart white overall coat and black trousers. She appeared to know her role and was responsive to her boss. The smoking morgue assistant broke all the health and safety rules with aplomb.

**EFFORT, ORIGINALITY AND ATTAINMENT:** This is a complex show and it seemed that although the audience was enjoying it, some of them could be heard voicing their confusion during the interval. Perhaps the synopsis could have been more concise in the programme, for these audience members? A vast amount of effort went into this lively, stylish and sleek show. It was an absolute pleasure to watch, from start to finish. The Principals were strong and carried this show high up on their shoulders. We heard some super vocals and the conviction of all on stage was 100% at all times. Congratulations on a super show!

**Thank you for your most kind hospitality and I wish you every success with your next production,**

**CLARE TOGHILL**