



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Society:	TAOS MUSICAL THEATRE
Name of Production:	'OKLAHOMA!'
Venue:	Arc Theatre, Trowbridge
Date:	22 May 2019
Adjudicator:	Clare Toghill

PRESENTATION/ SETTING – DESIGN AND DÉCOR: John Burtenshaw, Richard Rawlings, Jay Knight, Pete Grant, Bernice Hudson, Janet Thompson, Zack Mazan, Maria Matthews, Claire Borovac: The Arc Theatre has a compact performance space and this is a BIG show. TAOS Musical Theatre coped remarkably-well and the space was used very effectively throughout, considering the orchestra took up about one third of the acting space, (They were dressed as farmers and cowmen and were fenced-in stage left) and hay bales were placed DSL and USR. The backcloth / white cyc was used to good effect and a visually striking row of corn 'grew' directly in front of this. A rustically-painted, wooden wind pump /windmill looked fabulous USR, as it slowly rotated. Various elements were added to set the scenes; a washing line and laundry pail, a worn-looking rocking chair, a butter churn. The washing line toppled over near the start of the show and this could have been avoided by adding a bit more weight to the supporting struts. The Smokehouse set was a simple construction comprising two walls and a door to the dirty, old room where Jud hangs out. The attention to detail was pleasing, with pictures of girls pinned up on the walls and some farming paraphernalia dotted around. The surrey with the fringe on top was lovely and the flowers used to decorate it were beautiful. The, 'Jist Married' sign was perfect.

LIGHTING: Tony Giddings, Steve Riddle, John Hudson: I really enjoyed the lighting for this show. Some beautiful effects were achieved and the sunsets of the Mid-West were clearly represented. The cyc was used to full effect and a wonderful palette of pastels added tone

and atmosphere to the various external and rural settings and added clear indications as to the different times of day. By default, the set was bathed in a very warm, straw wash and this was perfect. On several occasions, the principals sang their solos beneath a spotlight, the cues of which were consistently well –timed. The sinister mood in Jud’s smokehouse was accentuated by the super red lighting which was directed at the action via two floor lights directly in front of the scene. The lighting state for this scene created a dirty, dim yet foreboding atmosphere. Gobos depicting the shadows of trees and leaves decorated the floor during the Dream Sequence. The magenta and crimson lighting shone fiercely onto the cyc during the Dream Sequence and this enhanced the foreboding tension on stage. Two simple strings of fairy lights were draped on stage for the start of Act 2, showing the setting for The Skidmore Ranch. A full moon shone on the back cyc. Well done to this department for their input.

SOUND AND EFFECTS: Martyn Johnson: On the whole the sound production for this show was very good. The balance between the singing and the music was perfect – and it is sadly extremely rare for me to be able to write this – so many congratulations to this department for this outcome. Unfortunately on two separate occasions, a radio mic had been left on backstage and we could clearly hear a conversation between two cast members over the dialogue on stage – this was highly unusual and highly distracting. The gun shots in the Smokehouse scene were perfectly timed and of a pleasing quality. The mics seemed never to be turned off, so during large ensemble scenes like the auction, the stage ‘business’ mutterings could be heard and this was strange; just take care to avoid this type of interference.

COSTUME: Joan Baggs, Karen Grant, Pat Burtenshaw, Sandra Tucker, (Hired costumes from: ACE Theatrical Costumiers and Bath Theatrical Costumiers): The male ensemble looked very neat and tidy in their checked shirts, jeans and cowboy boots. The Girls wore high-necked, billowy dresses with ruffles and frill a-plenty. Ado Annie looked bright and breezy in a red and white polka-dotted dress, white bloomers boots with red laces, a white shawl and a hat with red and white feathers. Ali Hakim looked dandy in his checked suit accessorised with a bright, red flower and a bowler hat. The ensemble looked full of summer joy in their straw hats decorated with flowers. The costumes for the Dream Sequence were effective; the men swapped their farming attire for smart, black shirts and red neckerchiefs. Curly wore a fringed jacket. Some of the girls wore Can-Can burlesque-styled outfits to represent the women of Jud’s desires. Jud and Curly were obviously dressed in identical outfits for the, ‘swap’ in this scene and this was all well-handled. This was an attractively-dressed production.

HAIR: The girls mostly had very pretty hairstyles; curls, plaits, up-dos and decorative ribbons. Unfortunately, some of the wigs were really unrealistic and almost off-putting; in particular the wig for the Cummins girl was quite tatty and unflattering – of course this didn’t hamper her performance in any way, but she could have been made-up with more

care and attention to detail. Wigs are notoriously tricky to work with so that they appear realistic and natural for the character who wears them.

MAKE UP: Sarah Davies: The make-up was very attractive. The men looked tanned and the girls had accentuated their eyes in a most natural way. Jud Fry appeared creased and oily; which was most suitable!

PROPS: I always enjoy seeing the props in a TAOS show! Ali Hakim's hand cart with a red roof was perfect, as were his goods for sale; suitcases and flowers were piled onto this cart and helped him to look every inch the peddler. The picnic hampers were wonderfully adorned with ribbons, flowers and lace. The food props were outstanding; there were lattice-topped pies, loaves of bread and jars of jams. The tables were set with gingham table cloths, flowers, mugs, and the benches were adorned with garlands of flowers for Laurey and Curly's wedding. Well done.

STAGE MANAGEMENT: Ollie Phipps of So! Stage Illusions, Emma Edwards: I have to heartily congratulate this team! The acting space was so compact and the cast was fairly sizable. Not only that, but the several scene changes were dealt with impeccably and the large props were manoeuvred around the large hay bales which were dotted around the space. The external corridor leading out of the auditorium was very useful as an entrance for the surrey and the Peddler's cart. There was a lot to consider for this vibrant and lively show and it ran smoothly and safely throughout.

MUSIC/ORCHESTRA/MUSICAL DIRECTION: Julian Clementson: The overture was very rousing, as one would hope for this show and it was a delight to be able to watch the orchestra play. The fiddler played with verve and the double bass added extra depth! The flute and clarinet were just lovely as the melodies were realised. The strings in, 'Pore Jud is Daid', were fabulous. In 'All er Nothin', the double bass and strings were noticeably brilliant and the rhythms provided by the drums and symbols were too.

DIRECTION: Anna Mazan: What a giant undertaking. A big show with a large cast needed a strong director and lucky TAOS – that is what they were given! The hamper auction was really absorbing and entertaining; the ensemble really went to town with this scene and brought it to life. The relationships between the characters were very believable; the kisses between the principal characters were passionate and heartfelt. Some of the cues started to falter just prior to Ado Annie's and Ali Hakim's entrance, which slowed down the pace here and the action became a little stilted, but this was momentary. The contrast between the men creating lots of celebratory noise by banging their wooden spoons on their tin mugs outside the window of the newly-weds and then the hushed silence as Jud entered the scene was striking. The fight scenes were absolutely top-notch in this show – utterly believable and minus the pantomime-like exaggerated mis-fired punches we too often see in Amateur theatre! The production moved along at a good pace and the scene transitions were secure. The balance between principals and chorus was sound and the jokes were all

fully explored and realised; not one funny line, glance or expression was missed. The darker elements of the show were treated with respect and this worked out very well indeed. Well done.

SINGING: The singing was admirably executed with a pleasing depth of feeling and the desired amount of gusto. Some of the timing was a little off, particularly with some of the song intros. The company came together to sing the ensemble numbers with gusto and style. The singing was a joy to listen to. The Male chorus sang in lovely low tones and created a wonderful, full sound. The harmonies throughout the show were very pleasing indeed. 'Pore Jud is Daid' included some wonderful harmonies, as did 'Out of My Dreams' with Laurey and the girls. 'Oklahoma' was a fine song! The singing was bright and infectiously happy and the sound produced by the full cast was rich and full. Very well done.

MOVEMENT AND DANCE: Anna Mazan, (Fight Choreography: Amanda Sterkenburg): The number, 'Kansas City' was fabulous; here we were treated to a tap dancing routine. Well done for not shying away from this and instead fully-embracing the fast-paced possibilities. The girls performed some basic but very effective tap steps in a neat row before joining up to create a circle. The men followed suit. There were some cheeky moments of two-stepping and some up-beat waltzing in pairs. Will tap danced and jumped deftly off a hay bale before planting a kiss on Aunt Eller's cheek, before ending up in an extended lift and perching atop the shoulders of two male dancers – all to the lovely music and singing of this number. My only note here would be to remind the ensemble that there is no need to look worried – just enjoy the dancing and look up and out and smile! 'Many a New Day', saw the girls sitting on the hay bales creating lots of pleasing pictures; the groupings were very effective here. One female dancer wore a man's hat and continued to dance like a fella with Laurey, before another pretended to use a lasso in dance and then four dancers performed a lovely ballet section – this was very sweet and graceful.

The use of space throughout all the choreographed numbers was exceptionally-handled. All gestures had a dreamlike quality in this number and the effect was very pleasing. In, 'It's a Scandal', the younger boys tapped their feet in time to the music and the Men were very good at the stage 'business' here too. Although the staged space was small, the dancers worked well together and never did the space seem cramped nor the routines congested. Several dance numbers used concentric circles and the hay bales were used to full effect; as extra levels upon which to dance and areas for group pictures and formations. Pitch forks were held high, before the women entered to scuttle their menfolk offstage. The use of space in songs was very pleasing, for example when Curly and Laurey sang, 'People Will think we're in Love', they moved across the stage from side to side, gently walking together and this was enough action to complement this already lovely vocal number. The Dream Sequence was delightful; it was very gentle and sweet between Curly and Laurey and the ensemble. A wedding veil was dropped onto the stage from a hidden pouch in the lighting rig above the stage; this was well-handled. The ensemble created a wedding congregation

and looked on as Laurey took exaggerated, slow steps to an imaginary alter. The ensemble turned their heads as a singular unit; this heavily stylised approach was most befitting for this scene. The can-can moves, the drama between Laurey and Jud, followed by the fight between Jud and Curly; were all strong moments. The stage combat was superb! It is not often that I can fully commend any stage fighting present in an Amateur show; but here, the 'blows' were perfectly positioned and the falls were appropriately 'felt' and excellently timed. Well done! 'The Farmer and the Cowman' was a lovely, lively ensemble number. The country dancing in rows, the fisticuffs between the farmers and ranchmen, menfolk whooping and clapping as the girls danced, fabulous energy and all of this resulted in a well-rehearsed and vibrant number.

THE CAST:

Aunt Eller: Lorraine Ferguson: She is the first character we meet in Act 1. She was seated on the old rocking chair as she pensively churned the milk / butter before her. She wore a peaceful, yet focussed expression on her face as she did this. When Curly entered singing, she leaned forward in her chair and looked up at him with a lovely, wide-eyed expression. She was very sweet. When Laurey flounced off stage saying hateful things about Curley, Aunt Eller's retort to Curley was very well-timed; "She likes you – quite a lot." She took control at the start of Act 2, when she shot her gun up into the air in order to capture the attention of the bickering Farmers and Ranchmen; she sang to the collective with authority and a well-measured pace here. She effectively held court over the comings and goings at the hamper auction in Act 2. She kept the action going when Jud had fallen on his own knife and she tried her best to keep Laurey protected. This was a sensitive portrayal of a well-loved character.

Laurey: Frankie Lewis: We first met her as she entered the stage singing and taking down the washing from the line. She looked out with a look of longing as she sang about the Surrey and it was easy for us to see that she was imagining it as she sang. She peeked over her shoulder to smile at Curly, which was sweet but I was still to fully believe in their chemistry at this point; they needed to look at each other more, although it was very sweet when she rested her head on his shoulder, for, 'Hush bird, my baby's a-sleeping'. Laurey spoke with a good amount of sass when she flounced off stage proclaiming that Curley was a bragging bum! Frankie was most adept at looking forlorn and downcast, as she had grown to expect very little of Curly, or indeed anyone around her. 'Many a New Day', was a lovely song and Frankie sang with great feeling; sustaining all of the notes with ease. It was very easy to like this Laurey. Her duet with Curly, 'People Will Say we're in Love', was nicely done; Frankie's voice had a warm tone and a lovely clarity and this number was relaxed and easy.

Ado Annie: Connie Knight: Her accent was spot-on and her cute facial expressions and regular squeals of delight were infectiously perfect for this role. Connie delivered, "I'm Just a Girl Who Can't Say No", with power and control; the high notes were strong. This was a

hugely confident and effective performance; the characterisation was fully realised here. Her comic timing was superb and her use of space was very pleasing; she skittered about from hay bale to hay bale, all the while obsessing about her romantic interludes. Her initial fascination with Ali Hakim was amusing; so consumed was she, whilst Laurey was referring to Ali Hakim's unusual name, Ado Annie's response was shaky, excited and frothy, "It's Persian". When first seated a hay bale with Ali Hakim, She was extremely expressive; flirtatious and flouncy. She very nearly kissed him, but saved herself at the very last second - the timing here was fabulous. "I'm just a Girl who can't say no", was a superb solo; Connie truly captured spirit of Ado Annie, as she owned the stage with her coquettish glances, flighty gestures and light-of-foot poses as she sweetly sang about her lack of resistance! This number was a highlight of the entire show. Her weak defence of Ali to her father was very amusing, "He called me his Persian Kitten." During the number, 'All er Nothin', she was especially good at appearing spoiled and petulant with her frown and pouting lips! Her jealousy at the two girls flirting with Will was very funny to watch, as she shoed them away. When Ali Hakim said his farewells to Ado Annie, he continued to encourage her to think of Will as her new Forever Love; he mentioned his blue eyes and his smile and Ado Annie's response was impeccably timed; "Do you love him too?" This received a very good response from the audience. Her entrance at the end of the show, covered in straw with her large, baby-doll eyes and her explanation of an, 'explained misunderstanding with Will', was very funny. This was a super characterisation.

Gertie Cummins: Lottie Diddams: Gertie was larger-than-life, frothy, silly, effervescent and fun. Her exaggerated girly giggle was perfect and had a good deal of power behind it. She shamelessly flirted with Curly in Act 1. Her smug entrance as the new bride of Ali Hakim was brilliant and she continued in this vein as she showed off her ring tactlessly to Ado Annie and Ellen. The fight between Ado Annie and Gertie was absolutely first-class! There was hair-pulling and screeching a-plenty!

Curly: Russell Syrett: He first entered from the top of the raked seating in the auditorium. There he was poised as he sang the infamous, 'Oh What a Beautiful Morning'. He sang with great feeling and his eye levels were spot-on as he looked up and out over the heads of the audience. This was a clever use of space and it allowed him the time to sing the song, as he made his way to the stage. He could have made his diction a little crisper at times and the pace could have been a fraction quicker, but this is a mere quibble! When he lowered in voice in, 'Surry' the tone was very pleasing. Whilst trying to convince Jud that he'd be sorely missed once dispatched, Curly stood atop an old crate and preached; this was good. He sang with gusto and an undeniable sense of conviction. The, 'marry me' dialogue between Curly and Laurey was very cute; when she agreed to marry him and they had kissed, his face was an explosion of happiness and relief – he was like the cat who'd got the cream. Curly's solo in the song, 'Oklahoma' was wonderful. Russell is in possession of a fine singing voice and he paired this with exuberance and flair to create a very pleasing Curly.

Jud Fry: Gary Robson: His first entrance saw him enter the stage with a trunk, his face creased into a dark scowl. He walked diagonally across the space to exit. It was clear from his posture and gait that all was not well with this man, his hair was greased back and he appeared troubled from the outset. The transformation of Jud from sulky and despondent loner to puffed-up, self-important farm hand occurred easily during the song, 'Pore Jud is Daid'. To start, he said the Curly, "What woman ever took a shine to me?" The dialogue between Curly and Jud was very well-executed here. His next solo, 'Lonely Room' was powerful; he sang with much feeling; he was utterly wretched. His entrance just prior to the wedding was powerful, and before we knew it, he was in a serious and then fatal brawl with Curly. His moves were extremely lithe and effective and his death was played-out meticulously.

Will Parker: Ben Jenkins: This was a most pleasing performance. Will was played with a zest for life and cheeky charm. His Southern accent was spot-on too. His dialogue with Ali Hakim in Act 2, was super; the fast patter of the buying and selling was very amusing. Ali Hakim's line; "Lucky fellow! I wish it was me she was marrying instead of you." was followed up with a fabulous, "It don't seem to make an awful lot of difference." This was a very funny moment. Will's, 'Oklahoma Hello' to Ado Annie was a passionate lunge, drop and kiss – this was a lovely bit of physical theatre. It was easy to believe in Will's passionate feelings for Ado Annie.

Ali Hakim: Andrew Curtis: Ali spoke with a superb, rich accent from the Middle East. In his confrontation with Andrew Carnes, he paced and worried whilst trying to ease himself out of any marriage agreement with Ado Annie. Ali's shock at the bladed telescope and its possibilities by Jud in the Smokehouse was palpable! When selling his wares to Will, he very naturally assumed the role of peddler and it was most effective. His disdain and despair on returning hitched to Gertie was well-played – Andrew made the most of this quirky role and made it his own. His comic timing was excellent and he really brought the dialogue to life.

Andrew Carnes: Robin Jukes: When he entered the space with his shotgun, he was calm yet firm with Annie. He powerfully threatened Ali Hakim with his close proximity and body language and whilst Annie played her cute card, his face remained stony. Robin made the most of every line and his timing was super; when Ali told him that he'd never see his daughter again if she eloped with the Peddler, Andrew Carnes's reply shot out, "That'd be alright..." this got a big laugh from the audience. His spoken, "shut up!" to the men in 'The Farmer and the Cowman' was brilliantly timed; his accent was always superb. He was a very likable character and was firm with his daughter, "You women jist keep outa the way. Vamoose!" This made us like him even more.

Ike Skidmore: Paul West: He put down Curly sharply, "Don't be a fool, boy. Y'caint earn a livin' thout a saddle." He was warm, inclusive and very direct when inviting Carnes to join them for some drinks at the wedding and then innocently matter-of-fact when stating that Jud had been out of the territory for the past three weeks. He heckled Curly about being

scared when the Preacher asked if he took Laurey to be his wife – Ike wasn't afraid of a spot of banter!

Fred: Ed Beazley: He added to the commotion outside the farmhouse after the wedding and then with more severity asked after Jud's wellbeing after he'd fallen on his own knife.

Cord Elam: Mike Holden: His line in, 'The Farmer and the Cowman' was perfectly delivered, "Who wants a ole farm womern anyway?" and his reaction to Ado Annie's retort was most amusing! He fought the Cowman's corner throughout the routine. His input into the auction process was lively and passionate. He was straight-talking and law-abiding when it came to dealing with the aftermath of Curly and Jud's fight. Mike played this fastidious character really effectively and we all felt the same as Aunt Eller and Skidmore when they told him to quit playing at being Marshall and to have a heart about Curly and Laurey's wedding night. Cord remained clear and authoritative until he was silenced by the community.

Slim: Mike Adams: He was a helpful member of the community and he offered calm directions to the group of men wondering what to do with Jud's body.

Joe: Bruce Thompson: He added to the communal tension during the auction, by raising his bid. This was a super scene and the cues were very tight which made the timing neat and this in turn enhanced the drama.

Jud's Postcard Girls: These girls not only looked the part, but they also danced with the evocative steps you'd expect – high kicks and hip isolations and the like. They added a good deal of sass to the show.

Kansas City Tappers: The tapping was a lovely addition – everyone loves a tap routine! They kept time confidently and clearly enjoyed this moment.

Dream Ballet Dancers: The Dream Sequence was powerfully realised. Each section was clearly defined and the atmosphere created was one of intrigue, followed by horror. The ballet was neatly and sensitively performed and the Can-Can girls added some fire to the scene.

Chorus: The singing was really powerful and full-bodied throughout the show; all of the well-loved numbers were brought to life with plenty of gusto; all of the harmonies were tight and the facial expressions were bright and sunny. This made the show a pleasure to watch and to listen to.

Ellen: Daisy Woodruffe: "You don't need Egyptian smelling salts to tell you why..." She sang this to Laurey and the other girls with pleasing intent. She was played as the slightly meddlesome friend of Ado Annie's and when she pressed Gertie on her recent wedding to Ali Hakim; she couldn't help but suppress a glint of a smile.

Kate: Sarah Davies: “Out of your dreams and into his arms you long to fly”, these suggestive words moments prior to the Dream Sequence, were clearly voiced to Laurey and the other girls.

Vivian: Georgina Isaac: “Then out of your dreams you’ll go...” Vivian added to the strength of this scene.

Virginia: Georgia Hills: “When the mist is low...” the wistful lines from the song were nicely added by Virginia.

Ladies’ Ensemble,(including Sylvie: Claire Warren) The ladies did a wonderful job – they added a good deal of energy and joy to this production. The hamper auction was an absolute highlight and the ‘stage business’ performed by both the male and female ensembles was fabulously absorbing. Their dancing with Ado Annie in, ‘All er Nothin’ was fabulous. The two girls who flirted with Will and made Ado Annie jealous did so with flair and panache!

Men’s Ensemble: The men certainly looked the part as they strutted around in their cowboy boots with their fingers hooked inside their belt-loops. They made up a strong ensemble and their energy and gusto with both the dancing and singing elements of the show absolutely contributed a good deal to the overall production. There was a pleasing level of tension portrayed throughout the auction scene.

Youth Ensemble: The children were a wonderful inclusion and they added charm and exuberance to the production. During the opening moments of Act 1, three girls and one boy ran on and circled the peaceful Aunt Eller in her rocking chair – this was a nice juxtaposition and the children’s zest for life lifted the serene mood as they chased each other around and back off stage. ‘The Farmer and the Cowman’ saw lots of input from the children; cartwheels, whooping, spinning, jumps – all of these were fabulous! The children knew all of their lines and song lyrics and they sang out with 100% conviction. Well done, Kids!

EFFORT, ORIGINALITY AND ATTAINMENT: It was a pleasure to come and see your version of, ‘Oklahoma’. The audience seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves and it was hugely entertaining from start to finish.

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