

Oh What a Lovely War – by Theatre Workshop, Charles Chilton, Gerry Raffles and members of the original cast.

Trowbridge Players and TAOS Musical Theatre

Arc Theatre

25th October 2014

Thank you for the warm welcome at the Arc and for the invitation to the show.

Oh What a Lovely War is an apt production given the centenary of the start of WW1; it is also a good opportunity for the two companies to work together and share the wealth of talent that is in the town.

The nature of the piece is something that relies on very clear and precise direction in order to create the cameos with great clarity, this was generally well achieved and overall the pace was kept moving well throughout the performance.

It is a hugely challenging piece to work on given the combination here of music, song dance and sketches whose juxtaposition clearly has a deeper meaning to bring home the atrocities of the First World War. Much of the impact of the piece relies on use of the projection, the huge loss of life and archive photos. It is often difficult to find slides that are available with current copyright restrictions, I would be interested to know where you found some of these as they are excellent atmospheric images to use. This was well executed and had the desired intake of breath as the evening went on.

The large company worked well together, I understand the desire not to mention individuals in the programme for their roles as it is indeed a company piece. The opening number and use of the trolley was a great start and it might have been an idea to find another time to use it. The use of the bridge was successful and allowed for various levels of action. A lingering image remains the “church” section in Act 2, which really captured the many different levels that Littlewood wanted to achieve with this show. It was good to chat with Sylvia Seaman and see the influence the Stratford production had on your production.

The simple staging and lighting allowed the company maximum space. I would have been inclined to have the stage team in costume or given more responsibility to the company for scene changes rather than break the seamless nature of the piece. The orchestra were well placed in their bandstand and looked a treat under the control of Helen Heaton. The sound balance was often in favour of the band rather than the singers which was disappointing as an audience

National Operatic and Dramatic Association

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member; it is always worth considering that if two people are participating in a number and one of them does not have a microphone then there is a real possibility that person will not be heard.

I think many companies could learn from your example of working with other groups. It is clearly a way of extending members skills and working in a far more co operative way. I am sure it has also introduced a new audience to both societies and the mutual support will remain for years to come. The benefits also enabling the company to have a longer run following what no doubt has been a challenging rehearsal time.

The audience clearly enjoyed this production and the story needs telling to the next generation, it might have been an idea to have collected for the British Legion as a retiring gesture, but overall I am sure you will have made a huge impact on those who were seeing the show for the first time and especially for those who were privileged to be part of the production.

Many thanks for the invitation and I look forward to the next production from both teams, very lucky to have such talent in the region.

Petra Schofield

NODA Regional Representative District 10

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