

**NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD  
Showcase Festival**

**Little Waltham Drama Group**

***A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES***

**7th July 2016**

**Introduction**

This was a colourful, joyful celebration of well-known music from films from the 1940s to the present day. The show was well attended by an enthusiastic audience, and the directors made good use of the shape of the hall to present some favourite movie songs.

**Front of House**

We were warmly welcomed and made comfortable on aisle seats. The programme was well designed, though no song credits were given (is this not a requirement of the Performing Right Society?). It might also have been nice to have had a reminder of which films the songs came from, although in many cases this was flagged up by the voiceover commentator. The cheery photos of the cast in the centre pages were a welcome sight. We were thoroughly spoiled by being given a glass of Pimms at the interval, and even more so by the very inventive artistic and culinary talents of Kim (I think it was you?) - popcorn inspired cakes in film inspired boxes were an unexpected and delightful treat.

**Lighting & Sound**

The lighting always supported the mood of the numbers, and created all the atmosphere needed on the curtained setting. The follow spot was skilfully operated, just picking up the principals smoothly and unobtrusively, and giving highlight where needed.

As far as I could tell the singers were not amplified, and with this size of hall that is as it should be. However, there were some moments when the singers could not be heard above the band. This must largely be due to the necessary positioning of the band amongst the audience stage left. Most of the time their sensitive accompaniment allowed the singers to shine. The voiceover announcements were clear and this and the second half opening music gave the sense of being in a cinema.

**Set and Staging**

The combination of well lit curtains and the excellent use of the space which the Memorial Hall affords meant that an air of glamour pervaded, and the cast moved effortlessly around the space, so that each number flowed from the last. We particularly liked the inventive but sparing use made of the central aisle, the position of which gives the hall its unique character. Bringing three of the "Time Warp" dancers forward helped to bring the action closer to all the audience at the close of the first half. The choreography was slickly executed and so it was worth allowing the back half of the audience a close experience. The use of two levels on the stage was an excellent idea for this show, as it allowed the whole ensemble to be seen and heard when on stage..

**Props**

Props were minimal in this show, but the occasional ones used were well chosen.

### **Costumes and Make-up**

From the sophisticated black dresses and diamonds with white ties and tails of the opening numbers, revisited for the James Bond theme, through to the startlingly sexy basques and boas of "But I Am A Good Girl" the costumes were colourful, consistent and well thought-through. The check shirts and cowboy boots of the 50s "Calamity Jane" numbers, the 80s and 90s t-shirts and the "Sister Act" style cassocks for "I Will Follow Him" all evoked their eras.

### **Structure**

The show running order was arranged chronologically across the decades of film history and this gave a snapshot of the style of film music in each era. It might have been good to have had one or two more films represented in each era, but those selected were evocative of their time and well executed.

### **Music**

The three piece band, Dave Perry, Trevor Lee and Kevin Jones were accomplished musicians who played with energy and pace, as well as with sensitivity to their role as accompanists, as mentioned above. The Musical Director, Rebekah Walker, had coached her singers well, and created a well balanced ensemble for each piece. Individuals were given opportunities to show their strengths and solos were shared appropriately among the company.

### **Choreography**

Kim Travell and Liz Jones kept the ensemble moving to the rhythms throughout, with dance moves apt for the different eras visited, with some tap dancing for the 40s, Funky 70s for "Time Warp" and burlesque for "But I Am A Good Girl". I also noted the funky footwork in "Footloose", and the macho display of "The Eye of the Tiger". The relaxed movement of "You Can't Stop the Beat" from "Hairspray" gave scope for the cast to really enjoy themselves. The joyous whole company number "Happy" at the end, with the cast moving all around us ensured that the whole evening ended on a high note.

### **Performances**

There were some lovely solos and duets, and "As Time Goes By", "Lullaby of Broadway", "Moon River" and "Nobody Does It Better" standing out in the first half, with the lively "Deadwood Stage" and the energetic, macho "The Eye of the Tiger" giving a boost of energy in Part 2, and the memorable "Time of My Life", "Everything I do" and "Don't Stop Believin'" bringing those films and eras back so vividly.

### **Production and direction**

The show was full of exuberance and fun. All elements worked well together to bring everything to life despite a slightly hesitant beginning. Really a strong punchy start for the first number was required, and I believe something went wrong there on this first night performance. However this was very rapidly recovered and the cast never looked back.

### **Summary**

A very enjoyable show with something for everybody (audience and performers alike) giving the strong feeling of a community coming together to do something they love and play to their strengths. Thank you for having us.

Sheila Foster with Jane Rayner (NETG Adjudicators)