

Group: TODS
Show: Follies
Venue: The Sinden Theatre, Tenterden
Date: Saturday 23rd February
Stage Director: Louisa Nelson Chamber
Musical Director: Ian Harby

noda

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Follies: with music and lyrics by Sondheim from the book by James Goldman. The story concerns a reunion in a crumbling Broadway Theatre, scheduled for demolition, of the past performers of the "Weismann's Follies", a musical revue which reflected the Ziegfeld Follies that played in that theatre between the World Wars. It focuses on two couples, Buddy and Sally Durant Plummer and Benjamin and Phyllis Rogers Stone, who are attending the reunion. Sally and Phyllis were showgirls in the Follies. Both couples are deeply unhappy with their marriages. Buddy, a travelling salesman, is having an affair with a girl on the road; Sally is still as much in love with Ben as she was years ago; and Ben is so self-absorbed that Phyllis feels emotionally abandoned. Several of the former showgirls perform their old numbers, sometimes accompanied by the ghosts of their former selves.

The Broadway production opened on April 4, 1971. The music was award-winning and the production very costly.

Front of House: The front of house was well organised and welcoming.

Theatre Ambience: This theatre has tiered seating and every seat has a good view of the stage

The Programme: The program was attractive, inventive and informative however the pages showing the musical numbers and the cast were difficult to read. There was obviously a great deal of support from local businesses in the advertisements.

Scenery/Set/Properties: The open set with sets of tables and chairs was effective in its simplicity and with good use of a downstage entrance from the auditorium together with the upstage right stairs there was a real feel for the Revue Bar. The centre stage gave plenty of room for movement.

Lighting & Sound: Both the lighting and sound were well executed and unobtrusive.

Make Up/Hair/Costume: The characters were all suitably dressed to demonstrate their roles and character. Overall the costumes balanced well and the make up most effective. I would prefer to see black shoes with any form of dinner jacket and picky though it may seem clean shiny black shoes really do fit the period and the outfits.

Music/Orchestra: The orchestra led by Ian Harby made a really good sound and he kept an effective balance between the sound of the vocalists and the orchestra most of the time. The brass section was a little overpowering at time particularly towards the end of the show. One musician of note was the trumpeter who had a wonderful solo where he was playing the muted trumpet under the libretto – it was so mournful and moving.

The Production: Follies is a difficult show to do as there are no set changes and whilst there are opportunities for cast to leave the stage there needs to be a great deal of concentration and focus in order to keep the momentum going. It is so easy with this show to get confused about the individuals however the casting was such that the pairs were easy to follow. Matthew Meredith, as Roscoe, had probably the most beautiful melody in the show, *Beautiful Girls* which he sang with great assuredness and good tonal quality. Barbara Gray and Monika Green are to be congratulated on the empathy they created, as Heidi Schiller and Young Heidi, during *One More Kiss*. The ensemble consisting of eight actors worked hard both with energy and commitment to maintain their characterisations. Each and every principal played their role with great integrity - there were some emotional moments, some hard, intense passages and some very difficult sections

with very emotional undertones all of which they tackled extremely well and took the audience on the journey with them. There were mixed responses to the show as we left the audience but as the director stated "Sondheim Musicals are like Marmite". In general, the praise was for the cast and their interpretation rather than the show itself.

Congratulations to the director, Louise Nelson Chamber for her inspirational positioning and interpretation. The Musical Director, Ian Harby, is to be praised for getting such a high standard of musicianship from the principals and chorus alike.

TODS are to be congratulated on tackling this very difficult show with such style and panache.

Kay Rowan
NODA South East Councillor