

OKLAHOMA! ...More than O.K.

It Was GREAT!

Review

By Jane M. Stephens, November 24, 2009

West Hartford & Oklahoma have a lot to be proud of this year. Oklahoma celebrated its 102nd year as a state on November 16, and from November 19 -22, West Hartford Community Theater produced the most entertaining and professional revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's classic, *Oklahoma!* that this reviewer has ever seen.

Even more powerful than last year's superlative production, this year's show was worthy of a professional



stage. The crowds were overflowing on Sunday, and along with myself, they were swept away by the exuberant performances of the 40 member ensemble. This year's show was SAF on steroids!

The 21 piece orchestra was expertly conducted by Emmett Drake. With a score that simply melts all your troubles away, their performance was almost flawless and definitely Broadway worthy.

Chris Cobb Olsen, playing the male lead of Curly McClain delivered a wildly realistic and professional interpretation of the cowboy, with acting skills most professional theaters would die for. His voice was clear, crisp and pleasing. His overall performance was exceptional. The chemistry with his onstage love, Laurey Williams, played by Katie Meagher, was both real and enchanting. Katie's voice was flawless and this reviewer was mesmerized every time she began to sing. Katie is a graduate of The Hartt School, and it shows.

The founder of West Hartford Community Theater, Bruce La Roche, played the role of Will Parker brilliantly. His gorgeous voice, spectacular dancing, along with his trick roping and incredible comic timing stole the show. The woman next to me whispered in my ear, "He should be on Broadway", and I agree. It was a treat to watch La Roche & his love interest, Ado Annie, played by Catherine Joseph, cuddle & kiss. Joseph was indeed a "Girl Who Cain't Say No". She mastered the lovable, flirtatious character and her voice was very well trained and a pleasure to listen to. Together, the pair should team up and go on tour.

The role of Jud was portrayed by S. Adam Granato. Although short in stature and a very petite man, Granato controlled the stage while on it and performed the role in a most menacing and disturbing manner, as it was meant to be. An overall excellent performance.

Other cast members included, Ali Hakim (the peddler man), played by Sal Uccello and Aunt Eller, played by Kayzie Rogers. Each put forth wonderful performances that brought lots of laughter to the faces of the audience members.

The dance numbers were superbly choreographed and made the audience feel as if they were part of the celebration. The dance number in Kansas City was almost flawless and the ho-down in The Farmer & The Cowman was a treat. The choreography was masterfully created by Jana Rumbaugh, a new face to West Hartford Community Theater, and one that we hope to see again very soon.

Another highlight of the show, and there were so many, was the addition of the Connecticut Concert Ballet, who performed the Dream Ballet at the end of Act I. They were simply enchanting. Other stand outs in the cast were S. Porta as Andrew Carnes and Mitchell Hess as Cord Elam. Porta was hysterical as Ado Annie's father and Hess was "spot on" as Elam.

Bravo to this theater company for bringing West Hartford residents & the surrounding towns live Broadway musicals where adult and kids put forth amazing performances. And for those of you that missed this show...too bad...but don't miss it next year! Cheers!