

## Chicago: New Theatre Oxford Review

Chicago. The most glamorous and sassy musical around. A musical that is sure to make you leave feeling fabulous and wanting to go back to see it again.

The musical paints the scene of 1920's America, home to dazzling Roxy Hart (played by the talented Hayley Tamaddon), who dances her way around the worrying and fatal consequences she is sure to face, as a result of the murder of her love interest, Fred Casely (played by Francis Foreman). Expecting her soppy and loveable husband, Amos Hart (Neil Ditt), to take the blame, Roxy receives the shock of her life when she soon realises she's been caught out and labelled a liar. Desperate for help, she soon begs popular lawyer Billy Flynn (played by the tremendous John Partridge), for his help. She is however is stunned when the cold reality of \$5000 is required for his help. Using her glitz and musing, she manages to encourage Billy Flynn to take her case, sharply turning her from a cold blooded murderess to Chicago's sweetheart.

Throughout the musical Tamaddon performs beautifully, effectively portraying the characteristics of the sassy yet enchanting Roxy Hart, complete with comic one-liners and over exaggerated actions. However, it soon becomes inevitable that she is quickly out-sung by the other characters surrounding her on the stage, during the various numbers. One of the most prominent numbers this appeared to be the case in, was "My Own Best Friend", where, although Velma Kelly (played by the superb Sophie Carmen-Jones) sings the echo of Roxy, her voice seems to be more distinctive and noticeable, causing Tamaddon to drown under her partner in crime and accompanying orchestra. This therefore begs the question as to why the main character of the musical is being drowned out by those lesser than her. When later discussing this it is important to note that Velma Kelly was always the more ruthless and cut-throat character throughout the performance, further explaining why she takes a main role within the stunningly performed duets.

It later becomes evident that Roxy is not the only character to be struggling to be heard over the strong ensemble, as the volume of singing from Partridge (who plays the character of the unforgettable Billy Flynn) also raises some concerns, this being evident in my favourite number "We both reached for the Gun". During this number, Billy Flynn is controlling Roxy, like a puppeteer controls a puppet, causing her to say and act in a manner that causes the public to see her as a vulnerable innocent young lady, who defended herself, such as the name of the number suggests. However, although Partridge is clear when singing as the character of Roxy, when the ensemble join in it becomes evident that Partridge strains for his voice to be barely heard over the cacophony of music. This is further contrasted with the booming and presumptuous voice of Billy Flynn, in between the numbers, again causing confusion in the contrast of volume of Partridge throughout the evening.

Throughout the performance the ensemble was outstanding, effectively portraying both the brutal and merciless traits found in criminals fighting for freedom, particularly in "Razzle Dazzle", where Roxy soon realises that she has to be prepared to lie and cheat her way out of the situation, whilst the continuous reminder of death is looming over her. During this the ensemble were perfectly synchronised, forming a suitable and effective frame around Roxy and Flynn, allowing the audience to be truly dazzled.

The minimalistic scenery and props used around the plat-formed and gold-rimmed stage further contributed to the effectiveness of the performance, allowing all characters to stand out in their provocative costumes, against the perfect contrast of the simple dark dimly lit background. However, during the number “Mr Cellophane” I felt that the lighting was not as effective as it could be, if it were dimmed a little more. This would have further exaggerated the brightness of Amos Hart’s white-gloved hands, thus reinforcing the invisibleness of the neglected husband when around others.

Furthermore, the way the orchestra, alongside the ensemble, were on stage throughout the whole performance was usual, however effective in terms of how they became the background scenery on the stage, thus bringing the scenes to life.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the performance of Chicago, due to the outstanding and beautiful comic moments throughout the musical, contrasted with the simplicity of the set design that allowed the characters to fully captivate the audience. Although I have addressed a number of issues, I would definitely recommend this production to others, as it is sure to be a dazzling and unforgettable experience.