

Chicago, New Theatre Oxford Review

Chicago; Glitzy, Glamorous and Stunning.

Set in 1920s America, Chicago presents the story of the glamorous Roxy Hart (as played by Hayley Tamaddon) and how she struggles to deal with the consequences she caused by the murder of her lover, Fred Casely (played by Francis Foreman). Firstly, expecting her husband, Amos Hart (Neil Ditt) to take the blame, and then realising he has rumbled her explanation as to what happened - as a lie. When the punishment of death begins to loom over Roxy for her actions, she quickly enrolls the help of star lawyer Billy Flynn (John Partridge), but the price is an enormous \$5000 for his services. Using all her charm she does entice Billy Flynn to take on her case for the publicity which he adores, and that is when Roxy Heart changes from a murderess to star.

Tamaddon puts on a stunning performance throughout the evening; elements of the comical nature to the young Roxy Hart are played out with perfect comedic timing, yet it is felt that when the singing demands of the character appear, she is quickly out sung by other characters on the stage. An example of this is the song 'Hot Honey Rag' where Roxy and Velma Kelly (Sophie Carmen-Jones) sing alongside each other in an extraordinary display of a duet. However, the powerful voice Carmen-Jones possesses vastly outshines Tamaddon and makes it so she is in fact the only one that can be heard clearly. Whilst this is impressive, it begs to question why there should be such a battle of voices in a song which is symbolic for the formation of Velma and Roxy as partners in success, instead there should be a unison rather than a competition. However, when reviewing how the characters have been developed by the actors prior to this song, it can be seen that Velma was always the stronger character so it makes sense for her to gain a leading role within the pair.

Throughout all numbers that they are included within, the ensemble does a magnificent job of performing elegantly yet with the power and ferocity that the city of Chicago brings to the heart of all the people within it. A particularly outstanding number was one in which the timing of the ensemble was phenomenal and the positioning created un-paralleled glitz and glamour, this is of course 'All I care about' as sang by Billy Flynn. The visual effect was superb when the girls were using feather fans to create a bright and beautiful surrounding around Flynn, especially when creating the moving circle that framed him through part of the song, emphasising his extravagant nature.

However, throughout Partridge singing performances, there appeared to be a problem as to the volume of his performance. An example of this was within my favourite song 'Razzle Dazzle' where the ensemble seemed to drown him out almost entirely at various points, yet when it came to any of the acting prior to this, his voice was bold, assured and confident such as the character of Billy Flynn would have had. This therefore contrasts what is a notable difference between the excellent acting ability of John Partridge and the varying levels of confidence within his singing.

When assessing the scenery used within the production it completes everything that is demanded from a production such as Chicago. A simple golden structure around the stage is easily enough to frame an extravagant performance within, and in addition to this the black levels of platforms at the back of the stage provide an appropriate area for the orchestra whilst creating a suitable background for the stage, far improved from what would otherwise be a plain black background.

Overall, I found the production of 'Chicago' thoroughly enjoyable, the comedic elements were brilliant and some numbers were simply amazing, a special mention to 'Mister Cellophane' due to its ability to captivate and entertain the audience in both singing and comedy. I would recommend this production as a whole, despite some issues I have addressed, due to its general ability to stay true to the nature of the original production of Chicago and its entertaining ability.

