

Marion Giddings
Noda Regional Representative – District 7

Saffron Walden Musical Theatre Company Youth Group	<i>Blitz</i>
Haverhill And District Operatic Society (H.A.D.O.S.)	<i>Dead Man's Hand</i>
Haverhill & District Operatic Society – Centre Stage Youth Group	<i>All Shook Up</i>
Ketton Players	<i>Prescription For Murder</i>
Ketton Players	<i>Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs</i>
Bury St Edmunds Amateur Operatic And Dramatic Society's	<i>Mame</i>
Much Hadham Drama Group	<i>Quartet</i>
Much Hadham Drama Group	<i>The Constant Wife</i>
Sawbridgeworth Players	<i>My Boy Jack</i>
Bury St Edmunds Amateur Operatic And Dramatic Society	<i>Thoroughly Modern Millie</i>
Variety Express	<i>Thirty Dancing</i>
Water Lane Theatre Company	<i>The Merry Wives Of Windsor</i>

SAFFRON WALDEN MUSICAL THEATRE COMPANY YOUTH GROUP – BLITZ

Director:- Sarah Clark

Musical Director:- Keith Oliver

Choreographer:- Sue Raven

Performed at Saffron Walden Town Hall on 1st May 2009

From the moment the audience walked into the Town Hall, we were transported back in time to London during the Blitz, with clever use made of staging, posters, and screens showing authentic clips of London during this period, used to good effect during smooth, elaborate scene changes from the underground to the streets of London. There was never a dull moment in the play, and at the beginning, I wondered if you could possibly get any more action into such a tiny space. However, it did not detract from the main action, even with characters stepping over each other which evoked a claustrophobic feeling of being down in the underground. The choreography was good with both boys and girls equally at ease with dancing. There were some impressive voices amongst the cast, complemented by the orchestra, which being situated at the front of the stage could have drowned out some of the numbers but an effective sound system ensured balanced. Some numbers were very impressive, including Lets Play Mums and Dads. Everyone, down to the youngest on the stage acted well, giving 100% to their role. However, I must give a special mention to Danielle Cross playing Mrs Blitztein and Alison Cowling playing her daughter. Danielle played the part of an older woman really convincingly and Alison's portrayal of the blind Carol was kept up incredibly well during the second act. All the lead characters were really strong but so too were the rest of the cast. Effective lighting, sound and costumes all added to what was a really good night's performance. Congratulations go out to Sarah Clark, Keith Oliver and Sue Raven for this production.

Haverhill and District Operatic Society (H.A.D.O.S.) : Dead Man's Hand

Director : Pam Lawrence

15th May, 2009

I had never seen this play before but all the familiar 'Agatha Christie' elements were there. The isolated villa; the disconnected telephone; the threatening note and the strangers apparently brought together by chance. A chilly scenario from the past, that would seem unrealistic in this modern age of mobile phones and DNA etc. However, everything was not quite as it seemed and I have to admit that the first significant twist took me totally by surprise. The small cast worked hard to build up the suspense and there were some strong consistent, yet contrasting, performances from Denise Clayden, David Hart, Ian Davidson, Lorraine Mason and Jan Davidson. Unfortunately, a member of the cast had fallen ill and his place was taken, at very short notice, by Steve Powter, who had to refer to a script. This could have been dreadful but it is greatly to the credit of the whole company that, after a very short time, the audience accepted the situation and it did very little to detract from the development of the plot. Steve's characterisation seemed to strengthen as the play proceeded. Overall presentation was professional and effective and Pam Lawrence's production created a very stimulating and enjoyable evening.

Michael G Williamson

Noda Regional Representative : District 1

Haverhill & District Operatic Society – Centre Stage Youth Group-

All Shook Up

Director:- Amy Letcher

Musical Director:-Karen Chinery

Choreographer:-Becca Neal

Performed at the Haverhill Arts Centre Friday 23rd October 2009

This was a vibrant production of a musical inspired by songs of Elvis Presley, which while those of us in the audience were acquainted with them, must have been new to the cast. The standing ovation said it all at the end of the Friday night performance and was really well deserved. Congratulations to the director for making this, her first, a tight, slick production. She harnessed all the energy and skill these teenagers could muster and transformed the stage at the Haverhill Arts Centre into a magical 1950's Mid West American scene together with some clever scene changes and simple props, such as the juke box and the motor bike. The musical arrangements were really good, with the orchestra adding, not drowning the vocals. The choreography was also good, with all the cast performing well. Again, well done Becca Neal for getting the cast to work together seemingly effortlessly, on this her first role as lead choreographer.

I was amazed at the quality of the singing. Lauren Chinery's voice is beautiful and she surely must have a career in music in some form or another. Equally, for acting ability, Lee Mayers was superb. He carried out the difficult part really well without a moment's slipping out of character. Again, another one to watch in the future if he chooses to go into the theatre. Well done also to John Chandler whose natural flair for comedy made him the ideal choice for the part of Jim. I could continue to name names as they all did well and each and every one contributed to a wonderful night.

The strength of this company is the fact that a number of the cast have served an apprenticeship with HADOS and it shows. Let's hope that those who go higher education are replaced by others who appeared in this production and who are more than able to move into lead roles, as there is a lot of talent amongst the group.

Yes, Luran, the Centre Stage performance of All Shook Up left the audience exactly that, and tapping its feet.

Ketton Players - Prescription for Murder

Directed by Caroline Royston

17th July 2009

The versatile Kedington Community Centre was transformed into a theatre for the two day run of this new production. On entering the all purpose hall, you were transported immediately, to the drawing room of a substantial house in Devon, with the furniture giving it a really homely look and feel, just as well as Caroline's own house must have been pretty empty for the duration. The set design and lighting were effective, as were the sound effects. There was some very good acting, especially from Jo Bytham as the long suffering wife of the Doctor, Celia Bradnam playing Mary Haigh and her long suffering stage husband, Alan Haigh, played by Peter Upton. At times, you could almost dislike Celia and yet feel exasperated by Alan for not standing up to her. Sue Brown also played a convincing daily. The audience needs to feel characters on stage are believable, and this extends to the way they react to each other. Perhaps some of the characters could have worked more on developing their relationships with each other as on occasions, intimate scenes did not come across as such.

The strength of the play and this production was that the twist at the end was unexpected, at least for me. Without giving away the plot, and the ending, the natural acting by the chief protagonist, ensured that the twist, when it came, was even more surprising. Don't trust the quiet ones.

Well done, Ketton Players. It was a really enjoyable evening.

Ketton Players – Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Director: Sue Brown

27th November 2009

This was the first in the pantomime season for me and what a good way to start. This was a fun packed panto, with all the usual clichés that would be expected including some in jokes aimed at a familiar audience. I went expecting fun, I left still laughing.

The production was good. The choice of lead characters was excellent, together with going with tradition by choosing a female as the lead character. In the role of Prince Lorenzo, Miriam Dekker looked as if she were born for the part and her relationship with Snow White, played by Lauren Reynolds, who was equally good in her role, was good. Joanna Nicholas played Mussles the Jester really well, not an easy part as it requires not only acting in the main scenes, but keeping the audience amused in between. Well done Joanna. I loved Herman the Henchman, and even though he slipped a few lines, his natural wit and the spirit of pantomime meant that it only added to the comedy. The children looked as though they loved being involved. They are being given such a wonderful opportunity of taking part in performing and hopefully one day will be the backbone of Ketton Players. Also some strong acting from Jill Holmes, playing Queen Morgiana. She elicited the boos in all the right places. A mention also for the set design; in such a small company and with limited budget, the set was excellent and varied showing a lot of talent and hard work within the company. A lovely early start to the festive season.

Bury St Edmunds Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society's: Mame

Director: Jerry Herman

2nd May 2009

Mame was well directed on all counts. The relationships between the characters developed well, beginning with that of Mame and Patrick. Especially noteworthy was the interaction between Mame and Vera, with some great comic moments. Although somewhat slow to begin, the production picked up pace, and there were some wonderful scenes, which were effectively choreographed, including "The Moon Song" and "The Fox Hunt".

The acting and singing was strong, from the lead characters through to the chorus, and it was good to see such a wide range of ages taking part. Joseph Gilkes gave a strong and

convincing performance as the Young Patrick. Laura Stewart as Mame grew in strength throughout the show and gave a delightful performance, showing herself as a good comic actress as did Lou Petch as Agnes and Jackie Strahm as Vera. There were some effective scene changes using, for example, a back cloth in the hunting scene. Also effective was the use of the additional staging to the side. The main acting area, however, when representing Mame's apartment, was rather bare at times. Generally, costumes were lavish and in some cases spectacular, giving the production visual impact. Perhaps more consideration could have been given to the dress of some other characters, such as that of the Arab, which looked rather out of place. The occasional wig was also rather over the top, which detracted a little from the overall effect. However, generally, a great deal of thought was put into the wardrobe and added well to the overall production. Much attention was paid to detail throughout the show, although small points such as really pouring drinks into glasses would have been preferable and made for realism. Overall, Mame was a great feel-good production, which everyone, cast and audience, appeared to enjoy.

Much Hadham Drama Group – Quartet

Director: Barry Lee

Much Hadham Village Hall Thursday 12th November 2009

This was a really enjoyable, bittersweet comedy, about four aging, retired opera singers who want to revive their careers one last time in the retirement home in which they live. The four hand play was wonderfully cast with four equally strong leads. John Wetherall, played the sex starved geriatric Wilfred Bond, Jem Deans the cantankerous Reginald Paget, Jackie Lawn, the embittered Jean Horton and Maggie Smith, the ditsy Cecily Robson. There were some wonderful highlights in the play, such as the dramatic change in Reginald, who veers from a control freak to a crazed lunatic within seconds, brought to this state by being deprived of breakfast marmalade!! The set was minimalistic but really effective with the change from garden scene to lounge well done.

My only reservation was in the length of the play, due in part, perhaps, to some issues with timing and missed lines. Having said that, the volume of learning required by the actors was immense and I take my hat off to them in this respect. Apart from this it is difficult to find any constructive criticism as the play really was perfectly cast, the set and lighting effective. The cast did the director proud. Well done to all who made the production flow, including sound, lighting and prompt, all too often the unsung heroes of any play.

Much Hadham Drama Group - The Constant Wife

Director – Maggie Smith

I was delighted to be invited to see the production of W Somerset Maugham's The Constant Wife by the Much Hadham Drama Group. The bijou venue of the village hall did not seem to compromise the playing at all and of course the intimate number in the audience gave the feeling that the performance was for a select few only. The set was well thought out allowing ample movement around the furniture with working double doors at the rear and an attractive bay window to the left, angled for effect. My only concern was the large black and white photograph at the back which seemed totally out of place. Incidental music was appropriate to the period. Anne Senior was well cast as Mrs Culver with excellent diction and appropriate body language. Penny Deans also projected well and diction was good but at times lines were a little shaky and this was a distraction. Kathy Walsh and Paul Haines complemented each other perfectly as Constance and John Middleton and delivered their lines as of the style of the piece, flowing one line into another in an ever weaving pattern of colloquial language, using the art of pause to great effect. This production was well thought

through but lacked polish at times and I felt, a little under rehearsed. Nevertheless, the audience was very appreciative and enjoyed their evening. Well done.

Regards

Vicki Avery NODA

Sawbridgeworth Players – My Boy Jack

Director: Jo Learmonth

Performed at Victoria Hall Old Harlow – Friday November 11th 2009

This was a heart-wrenching play based on the true story of the death of Jack, Rudyard Kipling's son, who was killed in action in the First World War shortly after his 18th birthday. The play was well cast, with some outstanding performances. Special mention must go to Peter Dodkin, whose performance as Rudyard Kipling was constant throughout and very powerful. He caught the mood of Kipling well, portraying him with a stiff upper lip even in times of crises. In Act One, Scene 4, Kipling gives an address at a mass meeting, and Peter's performance here was spectacular. He *became* Kipling. One of my favourite scenes involved the three Irish soldiers in the trenches, Dan Thomas, Niall Silberg and Chris Simmons played their characters with comedy and pathos in equal measures and with incredibly strong Irish accents. The trenches were portrayed by sandbags and wire with some excellent sound effects and lighting. The horror awaiting the troops was really well portrayed, especially as the audience were aware of the eventual outcome. Possibly the only criticism with the way it was staged was the fact that some in the audience could not see what was taking place in the trench as part of the action was staged on floor level, obscuring their view. Niall Silberg, as Guardsman Bowe, must be applauded for his performance not only in this scene but also towards the end of the play when he recalls the final moments of Jack, his own health affected by the shellshock and horrors he has witnessed.

Congratulations also to the younger members of the cast. Ashley Smith played Jack effectively, especially in the trench scene where he seemed to relax on stage. Bekah Cranch played the part of Elsie Kipling and gave a realistic and moving performance, showing great potential in acting.

Congratulations go to Jo Learmonth for a very good , if sometimes difficult to watch, production, which left the audience reaching for their hankies.

BURY ST EDMUNDS AMATEUR OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC SOCIETY – THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE

Director:-Lou Petch

Musical Director:- Alan Humphrey

Choreography: - Heather Couch

Performed at the Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds Friday 6th November 2009

This was a vibrant, slick and thoroughly enjoyable performance of the much loved musical. Everything, from the effective use of staging, costumes, lighting, acting, dancing and singing was first rate.

This was a particularly strong cast, from the leads to the chorus. Congratulations must go to 15 year old Megan Polston, who played Millie superbly. Not once did she overact but gave what I felt to be a very natural performance, showing her talent in singing, dancing and acting. Lizi Long, playing Dorothy Brown, was very strong and has a natural wit which shone through in this performance. At times, Mrs Meers, played by Freya Smith, stole the show and together with her side-kicks, Bun Foo, alias Steve Chapman and Ching Ho,

played by James Barker, gave the audience much to laugh over. Overall the musical arrangements were lovely, with strong leads and equally strong chorus.

I have to mention the choreography as there were some really effective dance scenes, with some of the cast obviously being very skilled in this area of performance. I know that for others this was not their forte, but this was never obvious. Simple routines were choreographed which allowed everyone to perform well.

I thought the set design was very imaginative. To represent over nine different locations was a tall order, yet effective use was made of simple props such as doors, desks and laundry baskets which contrasted well with impressive Manhattan street flats to achieve this.

Congratulations must go to Lou Petch for only her second go at directing, to Heather Couch for excellent choreography and of course Alan Humphrey for a night of marvellous music and singing. A really great performance, much enjoyed by all the audience.

VARIETY EXPRESS – THIRTY DANCING

Producer:- Lindsey Head

Musical Director:- Geoff Page

Choreography:- Lindsey Head and Beth Antrobus

Plinston Hall, Letchworth on Friday 30th October 2009

This was a true variety night of the type rarely seen on the amateur stage, with a variety of comedy, singing and dancing, appealing to a wide range of ages and taste. There really was something for everyone. Comedy in the form of Farmer Giles, Klaus The Peg and the Two Dummies, left the audience groaning with their age old gags, reminiscent of Earnie and Wise. In its own right, the comedy was fun, but also served well as a link between acts. More risqué comedy in the form of Rocky Horror Time gave rise to much laughter from all, especially the youngsters in the audience. It was difficult to not to see two rocking transvestites when they appeared besuited in Showtime. Some of the dancing was choreographed really well. Dirty Dancing was effective, especially the lift at the end, which deserved the rapturous applause it received from the audience. Occasionally, the dancing was not as tight as it could have been, as with some of the singing and it might be worth thinking about whether or not this may sometimes detract from the evening as a whole which was fun, and as a charity night, for a good cause. Each performer has their own strengths and weaknesses and perhaps this could be utilised more to ensure the standard of each act is upheld. Practice makes perfect and for a few performers it may well have been the case that a bit more of it in some numbers would have made the difference. This is only a small point to think about in what was a good evening, with some wonderful costumes, good lighting and lighting effects. In fact, I would say that the visual aspect was the show's strength. The colours and contrasts in the costumes was at times wonderful, none more so than the final showtime act, where the black and white costumes were really effective. Overall, a fun night out.

Water Lane Theatre Company The Merry Wives Of Windsor

Directed by John Bell

Performed in the Monastery Gardens, Windhill, Bishop's Stortford 17th July 2009

The setting for one of the most loved Shakespearean comedies was perfect, the lovely Monastery gardens. The set was simple but effective, with only enough props, imaginatively used, to set the various scenes. Despite mother nature throwing everything it could during the second half, including heavy rain, thunder and lightning, and the local police helicopter trying to get a bird's eye view, the cast did superbly well. The first half was dry, fun and well acted. The occasional shaky line or two did nothing to dampen the atmosphere; that was left to the rain to try to do, although not succeeding, in the second half. Particularly notable

acting came from Richard Pink who played Falstaff, Michael Doe playing Doctor Caius, Caroline Mackrill playing his housekeeper, Mistress Quickly and Nancy Jones, who played Mister Page. I would also like to give a mention to the young players with Water Lane Theatre Company, who all portrayed their characters well.

When performing in the open air, it is always a gamble, and although the second half was more difficult to follow, due to the adverse conditions, I take my hat off to the cast for keeping it going. The show must go on as they say, and the cast made sure it did just that. It was a really enjoyable evening and I, for one, look forward to next year's outdoor production.