



MACK AND MABEL – REVIEWS

Kev Castle

“Mack & Mabel” involves the stormy but romantic relationship between Hollywood silent movie director Mack Sennett and Mabel Normand, transformed from an artist’s model to a waitress from Flatbush, Brooklyn, who became one of his biggest stars.

Sennett returns to his old studio in 1938 and in a series of flashbacks, relates the glory days of Keystone Studios from 1911, when he discovered Normand and cast her in dozens of his early “two-reelers”, through his creation of Sennett’s Bathing Beauties and the Keystone Cops to Mabel’s death in 1930.

There are some wonderful musical moments in this show. “Movies Were Movies”, “Look What Happened To Mabel”, the wonderfully choreographed “Tap Your Troubles Away” and the song that most people will know from the show “I Won’t Send Roses”, and the arrangements of the score are rich and lush.

Graham Ward (Mack Sennett), Sarah Millington (Mabel Normand), Ross Lowe (William Desmond Taylor), Abby Wells (Lottie Ames), Patrick McChrystal (Frank Wyman), Alison Sheppard (Mae Busch), Joseph Jk Smith (Fatty Arbuckle), Rob Holsman (Mr Baumann), Guy Molyneux (Mr Kessell), Helen Tunnicliff (Miss Jones), Celine McKeown (Ella), Jennifer Chatten (Iris), Sean Goodwin (Charlie Chaplin), Sam Turpin (Freddie) and Ray Samuel Mcleod (Andy) were the main players.

Other featured actors were Rebekah Daley (Mary Miles Minter), Stacey Ireson (the Writer), Adam Collishaw, Sarah Hill and Jenny Scott (Keystone Cops), Mike Bulford (Serge & Eddie The watchman) and Frank Ellis, Stacey Ireson, Sam Turpin and Charlotte E Barrington played the friends of William Desmond Taylor.

Not only did the above play the above roles but also doubled up for the ensemble, the tappers, Bathing Beauties, Keystone Kops and in other scenes. This goes to show how hard this cast worked throughout the evening.

I’m not going to choose any particular actor for any recognition over another because I just would not be able to do so. As a cast, they all were united in presenting their usual professional best. How could I possibly choose one over anyone else.

That said I must mention the attention to character and detail of the physicality of Chaplin, as mentioned previously, portrayed by Sean Goodwin.

Director Sarah Walker-Smith has researched the history of Sennett’s films and has added a few little extras with some of the characters which has really given that little spark to an already wonderful musical.

I loved the “movie” sections with the Keystone Kops, Chaplin, et al, and took me back to the days of my childhood when my Father used to show the films of the silent era including Chaplin, the Keystones, Buster Keaton and Laurel & Hardy on one of those old projectors which played the reel to reel films, screened on to a white sheet pinned to the living room wall.

What you will also enjoy, if you’re a fan of this cinematic era is the black and white silent movie that Carlton have made, and is played out in full in the interval.

What I also loved, and was really quite emotive was the ending with all of the red rose petals - I won't give it away, because it's a lovely piece of irony with one of the songs that Sennett sings to Mabel throughout the musical. Thank you, that was a lovely way to close the show.

This is a song and dance show and both of these were of the highest quality. The choreography, by Rachael Rees was worthy of any Hollywood film, full of glamour, glitz and spectacle, and that tap routine was spectacular.

Christopher Rees was in charge of the Musical Direction, and there really are no words to describe the beauty of the arrangements and the incredible lush sounds, especially from the string section. Like listening to a wave of music which has swept you away to the land of lush.

The Lighting was of the usual high standard that I have come to expect from Carlton Operatic. Design by Tom Mowat.

The Sound was also of the highest standard and well balanced. Designed by Rob Kettridge and the Production Sound by Rob Temperton.

The sets are wonderful, again as always, and include the Kops Police car, a boat and a train. They also range from the backstage rehearsal area of Sennett Studios to a full blown glittery stage for the big tap scene.

Many many more people are also involved in this show, and all local theatre productions, who work tirelessly behind the scenes and who I would love to mention, but my fingers would be dropping off by the end, but they all do an incredible job and deserve to be acknowledged.

Great singing, great acting, great music, great shame if you miss this one!

And can I also say what a lovely front of house crew Carlton Operatic Society have laid on to assist your every need and to make your visit to their show the most welcoming and enjoyable experience.

“Mack & Mabel” is at the Nottingham Theatre Royal until Saturday 11 May.

East Midlands Theatre Review

Phil Lowe



This eagerly awaited amateur production of *Mack & Mabel* by Carlton Operatic Society is probably going to end up as one of the best non-professional musical theatre shows of the year in Nottingham. Who doesn't like a big numbers musical comedy and heart-breaking love story based on real people from history? The show tunes and songs are not only familiar in their own musical theatre right but also through their past usage by popular Nottinghamshire skating stars Torvill and Dean.

Featuring an outstanding score by Jerry Herman, *Mack & Mabel* is widely loved for its classic Broadway hits including *I Won't Send Roses*, *Tap Your Troubles Away*, *Movies Were Movies*, *I Wanna Make The World Laugh* and *Time Heals Everything*. In the world of musical theatre where a show can have three or four really memorable tunes if you are lucky, this one is overflowing with them!

Mack & Mabel is based on the real-life romance between Hollywood legends Mack Sennett (Graham Ward) and Mabel Normand (Sarah Millington). It tells the story of a group of pioneering film-makers who brought to the silent screen, two-reel comical tales full of tantalising antics. They included fun and danger with silently screeching girls tied to train tracks, handsome heroes and dastardly villains in capes, glamorous and saucy bathing beauties and the hilariously chaotic world of the wacky Keystone Kops.

Directed by Sarah Walker-Smith and complete with dazzling choreography by Rachael Rees, this high gloss production of *Mack & Mabel* is a truly poignant love story and gripping tribute to the pioneers of silent film. The late Michael Stewart's original book of the 1974 show has been revised by best-selling author Francine Pascal. The live

orchestra is under the strong direction of Christopher Rees and the lush orchestrations are superbly rendered. The overture alone sets the mood and excites the senses.

The afore-mentioned anticipation is grandly rewarded by this new production's vibrant musical numbers some of which evoke the jazz styles of the 1920s. The ensemble songs are exactly what you would expect from a Carlton Operatic Society production. This occurs especially during the second half number *When Mabel Comes in The Room* signalling Mabel Normand's return to the world of the Sennett Studios. Patrick McCrystal as Frank Capra leads *When Mabel Comes In The Room* with his warm mellifluous tones. The closing first half number *Hundreds of Girls* is colourfully kaleidoscopic in its choreographic execution. Overall the committed Carlton Operatic Society ensemble give their everything to making this a very special night at the theatre.

Graham Ward, as Sennett is on top form vocally and dramatically. He shows off his musical theatre pedigree with emotional numbers like *I Promise You A Happy Ending* and *I Won't Send Roses* plus more energetic comical pieces like *I Wanna Make The World Laugh*. Portraying such a monomaniacal and unromantic character as Max Sennett, Ward still takes us into his character's obsessive heart and draws out our sympathies as he realises his missed chances to win the love of Mabel. This actor-audience connection is particularly true when Sennett's silent film career starts to falter due to the introduction of the 'talkies'. His chemistry with Mabel Normand (Sarah Millington) is palpable and the two of them bring out all of the complexities of their on-off relationship through their fine acting and Jerry Herman's songs and score.

Millington lights up the stage in the title role of Mabel the hash slinger (a server in a cheap US restaurant who is snappy with the customers) suddenly turned silent movie star. She has a very expressive and powerful voice conveying all the complex emotions of her flawed character. Millington handles the lighter *Look What Happened To Mabel* with ease and charm and her singing of *Time Heals Everything* is bewitching. There is a clear and moving transition between her bubbly vivacity as the 'star' on the film set and the vulnerable personality suffering from early stages of tuberculosis and hooked on drugs in real life.

The drug abuse aspects of the story are more alluded to than made a big deal of. Francine Pascal's revised book concentrates more on Mabel Normand's achievements in the world of cinema during her relatively short life rather than her weaknesses.

In reality Mabel Normand was a popular actress, screenwriter and collaborator in Max Sennett's Keystone productions. She had her own studio and production company and appeared in a dozen films with Charlie Chaplin and even more with Fatty Arbuckle. Despite two major scandals in her life she continued to work successfully in films until tuberculosis and her recreational habits took their eventual toll. In the show her decline is shown during the final scenes but no real explanation is given of the cause/s of her death.

In a large cast Abby Wells stands out as Mack Sennett's sidekick and skilled tap dancer Lottie Ames. Wells really gets to show off her tap-dancing skills in the lively song and dance routine *Tap Your Troubles Away*. This number has a feel of the musical *Chicago* in the dramatic way that the murder of film impresario William Desmond Taylor (Ross Lowe) is handled. Lowe does louche very convincingly and his short performance is one of the acting highlights of the show.

A character that was invented for this show is Miss Jones played by Helen Tunnicliff. Her ditzy, disorganised and star struck character is brilliantly demonstrated by Tunnicliff who clearly possesses a talent or three for comedy.

Even though the show has a sad ending, the sound of most of the audience sniffing back the tears is a true sign of a strong emotional connection with the show and characters. What company could ask for more than that? Terrific stuff. The rose petal fall at the end is a beautiful touch and a fond way of remembering the beauty and talents of Mabel Normand.

Mack & Mabel runs at Nottingham Theatre Royal until Saturday 11 May 2019.

Audience Comments

"Amazing tonight well done to all. It was an amazing show had a tear in my eye at the end" – Heather Moore

"Went to see this show tonight fun laughter singing dancing really enjoyed the show well done everyone. After seeing Mack and Mabel for the first time last night, can highly recommend going to see this show, it's got everything laughter singing dancing well worth going not to be missed 🤝🤝" – Susan Thay

"Thoroughly enjoyed the whole show, music, dancing, singing and acting. Well done Carlton 🤝🤝🤝" – Paul McPherson

"Mack and Mabel - Theatre Royal, Nottingham. Absolutely loved this performance, it would give some of the west End shows a run for their money. I saw the matinee performance on Wednesday 8 May 2019 and left on a high after such a fab show. EVERYONE in the cast was exceptional and although Mack and Mabel were leads who excelled I felt the rest of the cast were exceptional too. Well done and thank you all for such a great show." – Lorraine Gee

"Been to matinee today. Just brilliant" – Diane Devonshire

"On my way home after seeing today's matinee performance!! Absolutely brilliant!! The biggest compliment I can give is that it moved me as much as when I saw Michael Ball star in in it at the same theatre a few years ago XX 🤝🤝" – Angela Taylor

"What an amazing evening watching this superb production. The acting was first class, the sets impressive and the direction providing a fast pace throughout. Even a bit of tap dancing, done brilliantly. Highly recommended" – Tony Bates

"Enjoyed watched it last night it was Amazing" – Heather Moore

"this is done by an 'amateur' theatre company... not that you can tell... they were absolutely superb!" – Peter Fairholme

"Fantastic performance last night. So much talent. A lady said to me it was a professional performance. Words are so true. Thoroughly enjoyed it. Miss being on stage with you all 🤝🤝" – Jayne Allitt

"My word I have some ridiculously talented friends! Carlton Operatic Society you should be seriously proud of yourselves, what a cracking show! Sarah Walker-Smith the direction was phenomenal, you are one clever lady, Sarah Millington and Abby Wells you actually blew me away! Two completely different yet equally as professional performances!! I was so proud of you both - I was in the audience like, I KNOW THEM, THEY'RE MY FRIENDS 🤝🤝 Graham, fantastic as always! Patrick McChrystal I could listen to you sing all day - what a voice!! Helen Tunnicliff I was laughing so hard, you were fab!! Claire Collishaw, Adam Collishaw, Jenny Scott, Sarah Hill, you were all fab! Christopher Rees the orchestra sounded fantastic and the cast sounded amazing, well done you! Rachael Rees, awesome, lively choreography! Tom Mowat as always the lighting was spot on! All stage crew a huge well done to slick and professional scene changes and running of the show!! An all round fantastic show, if you haven't seen it yet I urge you to get tickets because you really are missing out if you don't see this one. Well done to everyone involved, Thank you for a wonderful evening's entertainment! I'm sorry if I've missed anyone out, you were all fab, proud to know you!!xXxXx!" – Kate Taylor

Theatre Online [Thursday]

Pre-Show

Good evening and welcome to Nottingham's Theatre Royal for tonight's performance. Having seen Michael Ball in a recent tour of the show I am looking forward to the show tonight. Carlton Operatic have always produced high quality shows and reviews I have seen so far have been very good. My comments will be during the interval and after the show.

This sparkling musical is set in the era when 'Movies Were Movies' and is based on the real-life romance between legendary filmmaker Mack Sennett and his beautiful, talented rising star Mabel Normand.

It captures the excitement of Hollywood's golden age, the fun and action of the silent screen, the hysterical madcap chaos of Fatty Arbuckle and the Keystone Kops, and the glamour of the bathing beauties. A world where heroes wore capes, girls were tied to the railway tracks and it all ended with a pie in the face.

The show features an outstanding score by the great Jerry Herman (Hello, Dolly!, La Cage aux Folles) and is packed full of classic Broadway hits including I Won't Send Roses, Time Heals Everything and Tap Your Troubles Away.

Time to take my seat and settle down to enjoy the show. More later.

Interval Report

This is certainly a biggie of a show and Carlton are showing what talent they have gathered for it. Great musicality is being displayed and the big singing and dancing scenes are very good indeed.

The set is impressive as usual at this professional theatre with this group and the accompanying sound and lighting are great.

The orchestra is superb and I am delighted that the sound balance with the performers is excellent. I can hear every word.

The main characters are being played well although I have to say that this is true of the whole cast. This is very much a whole cast that is working very well together.

The standard of acting is very good. The Director has obviously worked hard to make sure the show faithfully reflects the period in which it is set. The costumes help with this as they look very authentic.

I am really enjoying this production and the final number on the beach was excellent very reminiscent of the films of the time.

The songs so far are very tuneful which is not surprising given who the writer (Jerry Herman) is. Many more to come in Act 2 which will be starting shortly.

Post Show

This production by The Carlton Operatic Society has just finished here at the Theatre Royal.

I really enjoyed it and congratulate all involved for yet another great night at the theatre.

This is another triumph for this award winning society. Do come and see it if you can.

More soon. For now it's goodbye from the Theatre Royal.

Full Review

Mack and Mabel from The Carlton Operatic Society at the Theatre Royal Nottingham. May 9th 2019

Carlton Operatic have tonight again shown what an excellent society they are. Mack and Mabel is a big musical to perform: it requires excellent acting, singing and dancing, a lot of technical expertise and a clear vision of how to recreate a special era. Tonight's performance had all of these in abundance.

The story is based on the real-life romance between legendary filmmaker Mack Sennett and his beautiful and lively rising star, Mabel Normand.

There are excellent performances from Graham Ward as a grouchy but brilliant Mack Sennett, Sarah Millington as a hugely talented Mabel Normand and Abby Wells as a simply magnificent Lottie Ames. Ross Lowe is wonderfully sleazy as William Desmond Taylor and Patrick McChrystal is impressive as an earnest Frank Capra. There are many

other super performances from the principal and ensemble cast, showing huge energy and commitment to creating character and some lovely dance and movement scenes.

One of the strengths of this company is the way they work together and support each other. Many of the principals are also in the ensemble for the big musical numbers. These are of a very high standard - routines such as Hundreds of Girls, Movies were Movies, When Mabel Comes in the Room are superb and Tap Your Troubles Away is a brilliant spectacle. Well done to the dancers and the choreographer, Rachael Rees whose choreography is superb.

Director Sarah Walker-Smith brings this production alive in so many ways and never loses sight of the story that is being told. I particularly like the use of black and white film – a unique and cleverly created segment - and the custard pie scene is beautifully executed. The Keystone Cops routine is also exciting, amusing and well produced. Her vision – and that of those who worked with her - has been fully realised and the work to achieve this must have been immense.

The orchestra under the baton of Christopher Rees is excellent and the sound balance between it and the performers is just right. In addition to this the sound design by Rob Kettridge was crisp and clear throughout and the Lighting Design by Tom Mowat greatly enhanced the production. There are some pretty quick and precise lighting changes which are spot on.

The sets and props are very appropriate and scene changes are swift and well executed by the Stage Manager Amy Rogers-Gee, her crew and members of the cast. This means the production moves quickly and smoothly and the attention of the audience is maintained throughout. The costumes and hairstyles are very evocative of the era; it is impressive that many of the cast very closely resemble their real life characters!

Once again the Carlton Operatic Society have produced a show of high quality and all concerned can be justifiably proud of what they have achieved. There was an enthusiastic and prolonged ovation at the end.

“Mack & Mabel” is at the Nottingham Theatre Royal until this Saturday, May 11th. Catch this lovely show if you can.

NODA [Thursday]

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| Company: | Carlton Operatic Society |
| Production: | Mack & Mabel |
| Director: | Sarah Walker-Smith |
| Musical Director: | Chris Rees |
| Choreographer: | Rachael Rees |
| Venue: | Theatre Royal Nottingham |
| Date: | 9 May 2019 |

I always look forward to a Carlton Operatic production and once again with Mack & Mabel, the production team, cast, orchestra and crew have delivered another classic musical with skill, enthusiasm, technical excellence and love.

Although it is a temptation to discuss the on-stage and, in this production, on-screen performances, I wanted to first of all congratulate the production team. Chris Rees once again demonstrated why he is, I believe, simply the most accomplished Musical Director in the whole of the region. From the opening overture through every vocal performance from Principals, Family, Feature Roles and Ensemble the precision of delivery, dynamics and sensitivity to the vocal performance was a pleasure to experience.

Having also previously experienced first-hand the choreographic precision and attention to detail of Rachael Rees it was no surprise to see the exuberant, technically challenging and enthusiastic execution of the tap and other numbers by the whole cast, which is no easy feat...

Sarah Walker-Smith very successfully managed to bring the feel of Silent Movie to every aspect of the production, from the brilliantly executed sepia film inserts (which avoided the cliché of “grainy film”) through the costuming and stylized over exaggerated film acting for the two-reelers. Sarah also managed to deliver the contrasts in the fortunes of the key characters as their respective story arcs making these very believable.

Graham Ward throughout the production delivered a forceful Mack. Sympathetic at times, frustrating, self-aware yet unable to let anything get in the way of his desire to deliver as many films as possible, as fast as possible and their ultimate success measured in box office takings. Sarah Millington was a completely believable Mabel, from sandwich seller, to enthusiastic cast member, movie star and finally a tragic drug addict.

The 'Extended Family' all added their individual contributions to the overall production. This was very much an ensemble team who all added to the success of the production so I won't mention every performer individually however I must call out Sean Goodwin's Charlie Chaplin which was well observed and refreshingly not too exaggerated, Ross Lowe, who brought exactly the right level of sleaze to his William Desmond Taylor and Helen Tunncliffe who made me laugh out loud on a number of occasions as Miss Jones.

The Ensemble, Bathing Beauties, Movie actors, Tappers and Keystone Cops all provided great impact to the production as did the sound, lighting and incredible orchestra who ensured that the cast had a superb lighting, staging and musical soundscape to show off their acting and vocal talents.

Congratulations one and all, and here's to Shrek in 2020

Martin Holtom