

The Grayshott Stagers

Critique for 'The Night Maxie Tortellini Hit Big Lola Latrobe's' April 2015.

Musical theatre remains alive and vibrant in Grayshott. Last week's production of *The Night Maxie Tortellini Hit Big Lola Latrobe's*, by The Grayshott Stagers provided a memorable evening of fun and entertainment. Not a show which comes readily to mind, but one which deserves frequent staging. A "Bugsy Malone for adults" could loosely give the general gist of this musical, but only because of its setting in 1920's Chicago with its hoodlums and molls, prohibited liquor and violin cases. The story line is a pastiche of personal biographies of a diverse collection of characters brought together by the common denominator, *Lola Latrobe*, the nightclub owning 'madame' in a male-dominated world of things strictly below board.

Maxie was written for, and first performed in 1988 by, The Portable Theatre Company, as a supper evening entertainment near Dorking, with director Heather Legat playing *Lola*. With music for *Maxie* written by Peter Brittian, father of Laura Musco, playing the role of *Ramona* in this production and with Laura's husband Steve playing *Angelo Graziani*, this production has a real 'family' feel about it.

Under the expert directions of Heather Legat and Edward Roberts the Stagers are to be congratulated on serving up a first class show. The staging of '*Maxie*' was excellent. A mobile and simple set design ensured swift changes between scenes and the colourful and effective stage lighting was pleasing to the eye. Heather Legat's considerable experience of musical theatre was very much in evidence as the cast excelled and delivered a professional standard production. The music and orchestration were superbly directed by Edward Roberts and the combo of piano, clarinet, guitar, bass and drums added greatly to the evening's pleasure.

Abi White, playing the title role of *Lola Latrobe*, did so with assured confidence leaving no-one in any doubt as to who was boss. She sang beautifully leaving the audience wanting more. Her real-life husband, Joe, made an impressive Stagers debut playing the gormless, but likeable, *Brains* and he introduced a much appreciated thread of comedy throughout. Ellis Nicholls playing the second title role of *Maxie Tortellini*, provided a quintessential portrayal of a well-tamed tough guy, all heart and harmlessness! Alexandra Yates and Bethany Magennis-Prior, as Casino Club girls, were a delight to watch; they sparkled throughout as they danced and sang. Laura Musco, Melanie Tyrell, Hazel Burrows and Jennifer Charters added a fair measure of glamour to "the best in town floorshow". The hoodlum gangs of Tortellini and Graziani, composed of Ellis, Steve Musco, John Dowsett, David Gow, David Landau and Ian Canovan provided exactly the right blend of menace and comedy and hit the highlights with their rendition of *The Meanest Guys*. Richard White as *Tony di Martino*, the nightclub singer with an eye for the pretty girls, provided a strong link as he crooned his way through the story.

Finally, *Fingers Rafferty*, the unappreciated club pianist whose finest years were gone, was played from the orchestra pit, by Robert Gillman. As the show's real

accompanist, Robert provided perfectly the story's pathos with his repetitive lament "I was the best"; "Yes **was** the best Rafferty, **was** the best."

If *Maxie* intended to portray the sleaziness associated with downtown Chicago during prohibition, then it probably fell short. This show was too well costumed for that; far too glitzy, spoofy and fun. A show in which menace translated into joy and celebration and *Lola* got her man – *Tootles Tortellini*! I do wish old *Fingers* hadn't topped himself at the end, but I'm a sentimentalist! Well done the Stagers for pulling off another success!

AJDB.