

Waveney Light Opera Group (WLOG), 'The Drowsy Chaperone'.  
Beccles Public Hall, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2017.

Director, Martin Clarke. MD Jon Gibbs. Choreographer, Jean Cator.

Let me begin with my main thought! What a lousy title for such a great show... Here we had a show that deserved more public acclaim...OK so it was big in America and had a decent press here in UK (but a shortened run in the West End!). Any show with the word 'Drowsy' in its title is in my view difficult to market!

From the outset as a seemingly 'marginally disturbed' audience member gets up and in darkness moves toward the stage (Security risk apart!), we become aware that all is not what it seems. Indeed, we are to be introduced to the 'Man in Chair' (Jason Lambert) who is to be the focal point and modus operandi for the whole piece. His seemingly isolated life, dominated by his love, nay passion, for this long-past show and its characters is an obsession. One to which we are introduced via his prized possession, the vinyl LP of the show. This is cleverly interwoven with an intriguing plot with many diverse characters; introduced by 'Man in Chair' who is the true star of the proceedings. His constant presence and interjections provide the true comedy of the situation which ostensibly is in his imagination...or is it!? Jason played this to perfection with never a faltering moment, his comedic timing demanding total concentration whilst on stage throughout. His persona was real but never allowed to upstage, (take a personal bow!).

Now we had the, not unusual, shenanigans of 'on/off' marriages with Janet Van de Graaf (Natasha Bird) whose effervescent personality was a joy to behold as she ponders her forthcoming marriage to Robert Martin aka Percy Hyman (Daniel Hughes), he of the ego and personal belief that he was too good to resist. This pair undoubtedly deserved each other and showed excellent perhaps duplicitous lovers' doubts throughout. This was compounded by the less than vigilant attentions of the lady of the title, the 'Drowsy Chaperone' (Debbie Lambert) who, with the everlasting drink in her hand and eye for an opportunity, provides a diversion for Aldolpho (Tommy McGee) who mistakenly attempts to seduce her as the would-be bride. This was a 'coupling' made in heaven with the hilarious, outrageous and self-promoting style of the stereotyped Italian lothario taking full advantage of the 'not unwilling' charms of our titled heroine! These two were, it seems, made for each other to the annoyance of the impressive impresario Mr Feldzieg (John Hammond), who had despatched Aldolpho to attempt to prevent the marriage of Janet, who was giving up her star role in his show to marry Robert. He perhaps needed to be more of the baddy of the piece as clearly Aldolpho was to become an audience pleasing favourite! Feldzieg's attempts to gently rebuff the ever-willing wannabe Kitty (Jayne Andrew) as the nicely portrayed air-head actress, were doomed to failure. There were other characters to add some gravitas to the proceedings: Mrs Tottendale (Sarah Cook) the marriage party venue host with an unwitting butler, Underling (Peter Simmen) offering some excellent vocal and comedic interludes especially the 'Iced Water' moment. We had a suitably incompetent Best Man George (Baden Aldridge) who could not be trusted with arranging the vicar for the ceremony and last minute arrival of Trix the Aviatrix (Emily Holt) arriving in style in the 1920's Biplane... (home-made?). She is then 'persuaded' by George that her powers as captain are appropriate to carry out the wedding ceremonies, as by now all is resolved and Janet will marry Robert, and 'surprise!' Aldolpho and the Drowsy Chaperone are tying the knot. Plus, other guests and even Kitty has got her man! Just to say how we enjoyed the Gangsters (Alice Cushing and Daisy Tyrrell-Kent) as they voiced their retribution working and singing in excellent harmony. Indeed, the musical numbers were outstanding and well supported by the attentive ensemble of Maids and Butlers, all worthy of a better titled show. No matter, this was a most entertaining musical which perhaps deserves a higher profile and WLOG can be assured they did it justice and indeed moved to an unexpected grand finale when 'Man in Chair' proved to be a little more 'engaged' than he expected! He was the real star! Great entertainment....

Review by: Terry Rymer (NODA Rep East Dist 6)