

East Surrey Operatic Society: Review

Performance: Annie (2006)

Review by: Derrick Graham (Reproduced courtesy of Surrey Mirror)

East Surrey Operatic Society (ESOS), The Harlequin, Redhill.



Where do all these talented little girls come from? And what happens to them later? By rights, operatic societies should be bursting with young boys and girls who have had the thrill of being on the boards in *Annie* or *Oliver!* and want to keep going into adulthood. Yet this is not the case. Thirty brilliant children were needed to bring *Annie* to perfection in the ESOS production at the Harlequin, alternate casts for each performance.

Thursday's team were the Badgers with a superb *Annie* played by Rosie Hegarty, who already, at 13, has been in *Annie* and *Oliver!* at other theatres and had the

confidence and stage presence of a seasoned performer.

The other 14 orphans equally well provided a good chorus where required and an enthusiastic dance number later in the story. As the supervisor of the orphanage, Miss Hannigan, Jenny Clarke drank copious draughts of gin, staggered about and blurred her speech sometimes a little too realistically.

Oliver Warbucks, the rich financier, needs to be at least middle-aged to fit the story, yet young enough flying about America to make his millions. Terry Foster made the supreme sacrifice and was shaved bald and "aged" to look exactly right. Perfect accent (missing with many of the cast) and characterisation and fine singing voice.

One tiny child who grew up and developed into a leading actress was Alys Dreux, here playing Grace Farrell, Warbucks' secretary. A fabulous performance, wonderful style and the perfect blend of deference to her boss blended with the command that such a position would hold. As a very small child she was in productions with her father Helier, he was still there with her on the stage, 20 years later and no doubt feeling very proud of her success.

The entire Warbucks household were very believable (ghastly caps for the maids) with Mark Nicholson as Drake the Butler.

The crooked Rooster and his girl friend Lily, were very convincingly portrayed by Francis Radford and Katy Rudd and their performance with Jenny Clarke in *Easy Street* one of the best songs in the show. Andrew Glass made an excellent Roosevelt, great accent, pushed around in a wheelchair and Fred Harrison, another stalwart of ESOS, as Justice Brandeis.

Annie must have a Sandy and this was played brilliantly by Finn, a professional dog actor, who has been in many productions and on TV. Not a paw wrong and great expressions.

The production was graced by the presence of the Mayor, Councillor Francis Dixon and her party and she will no doubt take back to the Reigate and Banstead Council the message from the stage, that it would be a disaster for Redhill if the theatre had to close for lack of funding.