

2001 *Carousel*

Most of us remember *Carousel* as the Hollywood sanitised version of 1956, shown regularly on TV. Those of us who are football fans of a certain northern team will remember *You'll Never Walk Alone*, one of the show's memorable numbers. That being so, *Carousel* will always be a popular piece – an unforgettable score with emotional lyrics and libretto.

It could, if not done sensitively, descend into melodrama and phoney pathos. ESOS's fine production under the baton of Angela Barker, the direction of Gillian Jarvis and the choreography of Vic Ruocca, never for one moment fell into that trap. The story of the rough fairground barker and the shy, yet strong mill girl has captivated audiences for decades and a strong line of principals and chorus made sure that one would go home with a song in the heart and clear vision of the story.

Kevin Stuart brought the exact amount of hard-bitten arrogance yet naivety to Billy Bigelow, winning over Marie Cousins' diminutive yet compelling Julie. The ill-starred couple who were never really happy in life, contrasted with the silliness of Sally Hatton's Carrie and Simon Cooksey's pompous Mr Snow.

Rhonda Maasz's Mrs Mullins, the owner of the carousel show a hard bitten edge, cleverly disguising her true feelings for Billy. Fine singing voices here made the characters believable and balanced. Pat Felstead's warm and down to earth Nettie linked the light and shade of the four main roles, while Alistair Lindsay-Renton's Jigger offered malevolent antithesis.

The show went from strength to strength especially in Act II when dynamic direction, magnificent musical management and creative choreography fused to give full rein to a superb ballet with Francis Radford and Alys Dreux as the excellent principals dancers. The solid and experienced chorus added much to this production in enthusiasm and sensitivity to the finer points of the plot.

The minor parts played by Fred Harrison and Phil Felstead as the Heavenly Friend and the Starkeeper could have drifted into total comedy given that both characters were not real people but their skill and experience in interpretation was prevalent in every detail.

ESOS have been charming us for many years and we are lucky to have such skill and talent in production and performance within our area.

Penelope van Bentomb