

East Surrey Operatic Society: Review

Performance: HONK!

Review by: Tony Flook (Reproduced courtesy of Surrey Mirror)

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



ANTHONY DREWE, who wrote the book and lyrics for Honk!, attended the last night of ESOS's production at the Harlequin last week. He said that it was amongst the best stagings he's seen of the work - and he must have sat through many.

How can I disagree with the writer?

It was, indeed, a polished production with several genuinely high-quality performances and an overall strength not always found in youth theatre.

Much of the credit must go to the director, Gillian Jarvis, for recognising and developing the youngsters' potential and to Alys Dreux, whose choreography encouraged the performers to extend their abilities but never pushed them too far.

Musical director Martin Hall's experience was crucial in giving confidence to the on-stage team.

Based on Andersen's The Ugly Duckling, Honk! follows the adventures and misfortunes of Ugly, a cygnet inexplicably hatched into a family of mallards.

Luke Kempner, at 17, already a veteran of several shows, won sympathy as Ugly - an outcast loved only by Ida, his mother and lost from his home much of the time.

He managed his mood changes well, sang his solos with confidence and made a vital contribution to several duets and group numbers. Suzanna Kempner, Ida, had an equally convincing voice coming to the fore with The Joy of Motherhood and looking pitiful as she searched for her missing son.

Patrick Clarke was an ideal casting as the devious Cat, intent on making a meal of Ugly.

His facial expressions supplemented his feline make up (dare I say it) purrfectly. He showed a natural sense of timing in his dialogue and with his actions in the show-stopping Play With Your Food.

Christopher Hunter brought energy and, bearing in mind his young age, a surprisingly mature croaky voice as the green from hat-to-shoe Bullfrog. Charlotte Cobain, the pampered hen Lowbutt, interacted well with Kelly Wheeler, the self-absorbed cat Queenie, when they conceded that It Takes All Sorts.

Catherine Rock and Michael Saunders made the most of their rather briefer appearances.

Some of the other players could have projected more strongly and one or two did not seem to fully understand their characters or to totally believe in what they were saying.

Overall, though, it was too easy to forget that these were all teenagers or even younger and many with limited stage experience.

Honk! is a show that's worth seeing more than once - I hope that other productions in our area can achieve the same standard as ESOS's.