

A most ambitious production

■ THEATRE REVIEW
by ROY ATTERBURY



IN CHARACTER: Paul Fairlie from Eltham's Bob Hope Theatre.

contributed picture

IT took more than ten weeks of rehearsal time for Eltham's Bob Hope Theatre to mount a new revival of the stage version of *Singin' in the Rain*.

Performed last week, it was probably the venue's most ambitious production since the theatre was completely refurbished last year.

With a cast of around 30 singers, dancers and actors, the director Chris Williams had a huge task on her hands, not the least of which was to find an artist with at least some of the talents of Gene Kelly.

The film version showed Kelly at his charming and talented best and he made an indelible mark on the history of Hollywood musicals with his magical interpretation of the title song that spawned

one of the best dance sequences in the history of the cinema.

From a critical point of view, it is not fair to compare one artist with another and this is particularly the case when one had all the glamour and backup of studios while the other had to perform in a smallish provincial theatre.

Nevertheless, Gene Kelly remains a hard act to follow but Paul Fairlie took on his role as a famous star of silent movies and excelled throughout.

He has plenty of charm, a nice personality, and a good singing voice. He is also a very good actor and managed to make his dance sequences appear to be very impressive.

Either he had a good choreographer or he was an even better actor than I suspected because he was making very sim-

ple dance routines look quite spectacular. His performance was superb.

A note in the programme for the show describes the original film as 'the best Hollywood musical of all time' which seems a rather sweeping statement.

Nevertheless, it had Gene Kelly at his best and it also explores some of the effects made on silent movie production companies by the introduction of the 'talkies.'

Humour

Take these away, what is left is an entertaining story line which is little more than an account of a young girl who is trying to make good in Hollywood and succeeds when she falls in love with a popular silent movie star.

This role was played by Natalie Payne

who, like Debbie Reynolds in the movie, had problems with some of her songs but she acts well, her singing voice has real potential, and she has a good stage presence.

One of the delights of the show was Rosie Smith whose beauty, grating Bronx dialect and awful singing abilities made her an ideal star for the 'silent' movies.

Her move to sound productions, however, created moments of high humour as did her battle with a hidden microphone.

She also excelled in the 'sound' movies made by the Bob Hope company and the dubbing of Natalie Payne's singing over Ms Smith's demolition of her songs was technically perfect.

Fortunately, Rosie Smith was given a chance to show that she has a very good

singing voice a little later in the action.

Nick Noakes excelled as a movie mogul while Ben Reeves brought talent and personality to his role of the male movie star's friend.

The Bob Hope Theatre production was slick, colourful and - for a stage musical - the show had been reduced to an acceptable length.

In particular, the 20 scene changes were achieved with remarkable precision by the stage crew and the set designs were a credit to the production team.

Jan Winstone's group of instrumentalists, too, played well throughout. Some of the dances, however, needed more polish to show off choreographer Charlie Dudley's hard work.

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