THE FARNDALE AVENUE HOUSING ESTATE TOWNSWOMEN’S GUILD DRAMATIC SOCIETY’S PRODUCTION OF ‘A CHRISTMAS CAROL’
Kapunda Musical Society
Chapel Street Theatre
Until 1 Dec 2007

Review by Richard Flynn

Where would English villages be without their women’s guilds, parish church halls and rather dotty vicars? And where would amateur dramatic societies be without plays like TFAHETGDSPOACC? Well, either coming up with something that mirrors all that is tedious and dreadful in amateur theatre, or accepting the challenge of the deceptively simple situation and keeping its audience thoroughly entertained.

The Kapunda Musical Society has opted for the challenge and succeeds almost without a falter.

Here we have a play within a play within a play. The Chapel Street theatre has all the right look of any village hall, complete with a hive of Santa’s Little (Middle-aged) Helpers decked out in red caps and T-shirts of various shades of tomato red, conducting a roaring trade in mince pies, home made sandwiches, fruit slices, confectionery, tea, coffee, drinks and raffle tickets. You try to take your seat unobtrusively, but there’s no escape – some way or other they’re going to get you! And they do!

Into this melee, running very late, stagger four Farndale guild women, determined to perform their Christmas show for which they’ve been rehearsing all year. One hapless man is pressed into service and other women comprise the choir for the carols with pianist (Robin Wittwer).

Director Don Arthur has chosen an excellent cast: Jennette Mickan as Thelma, Jody Arthur (as Mrs Reece), Lyn Wheeler (Mercedes), the very tall Matthias Prenzler (Gordon) who, in real life, is a clergyman, and a versatile Lorin Fiebig (Felicity).

The five play all the roles in Charles Dickens’ immortal story, so perhaps he should take much of the credit for the good script – but what playwrights David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin have done with it is something else! The company are equal to the task – the delightful, scene-hogging Mrs Reece (Arthur); the orthopaedic disaster that is Mercedes – a sustained performance by Wheeler giving bossy Mrs Reece a run for her money; Ebenezer Scrooge, played in hilariously ‘butch’ style by Mickan; the jolly, jolly Felicity (Fiebig) in a variety of roles notably half the Ghost of Christmas Present; and the long-suffering, jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none, Gordon (Prenzler), Mrs Reece’s special target for brow-beating and derision. So much for Christian charity!

The two-dimensional sets and the various props are just right – largely the work of Don the Director (as one would expect of a local village dramatic society) and the lighting and sound (the latter quite crucial to the action) are handled effectively - for most of the time.

If I have one quibble it would be that the ‘charade section’ dragged and could be omitted (sorry, Mrs Reece!). And a concluding admonition to all those men (reportedly at lawn bowls and cricket) missing from the matinee audience of mainly women and a few children. Let them be shamed into supporting their womenfolk in the town’s thespian endeavours. “Just because it’s Christmas! Just because it’s Christmas!”